Claims Conference Holocaust Survivor Memoir Collection

Access to the print and/or digital copies of memoirs in this collection is made possible by USHMM on behalf of, and with the support of, the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany.

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum respects the copyright and other intellectual property rights associated with the materials in its collection and makes good faith efforts to determine the copyright status of such materials. The Museum has a good faith belief that the materials in this collection may be made publicly available. The Museum welcomes additional information about copyright status. If you have additional information or concerns about the copyright ownership of materials in this collection, please contact the Museum's Library by phone at 202-479-9717 or by email at reference@ushmm.org.

Memoirs of a Refugee

BY

SULAMIF KOMISSARCHIK

To my dear friend Fenya
with best wishes of health
and happiness
from the author
Sulamif K
Milwaukee 5.25.95.

Sulamif Komissarchik

To My Dear Parents
Yudel and Rachel

Oft in the stilly night
Ere slumber's chain has bound me,
Fond Memory brings the light
of other days around me. . . . . .

Th. Moore

PREFACE

On the 18th of June 1987, after being a refusnik in the city of Kharkov in the Ukraine for about seven years, I came to Milwaukee. I was 68.

Now I am 71, and I often think about all the vicissitudes of life, about the long and grim years in the country I came from, about my parents, my brother and myself who lived through the hell of a life. In fact, I am often obsessed by the memories of my past life. On the other hand, I can't help comparing my life in the old country with that of the country I came to.

There is nothing outstanding, nothing extraordinary about my life in the USSR, nothing that would distinguish it from the life of other ordinary people. It is the lives millions had to go through. I was not imprisoned, though twice was on the brink of it, didn't go through labor camps, was not a prominent dissident. However, it seems to me that even such an ordinary life at the terrible times of the Revolution, the Civil War, the collectivization, the Stalinist purges, labor camps, privations and hunger is not devoid of interest.

I am quite aware I am not a writer. Nevertheless I agree with the people who consider that every person may write at least one book describing the story of one's life. There is something unique about every person's life. The story of such a life as mine may be of interest to people who lived under quite different conditions and have but a vague idea of what life could be on the other side of the globe. In fact, such a story might be quite instructive for the younger generation.

Recollecting the Russian proverb: "It is not the Gods who fire the pots", something equivalent to "a cat may look at a king", I get down to writing a story of my life. My purpose of writing this book is not for wide distribution. It is intended for my near and dear ones, for the friends I found in the United States, for the younger relatives here who might better understand and appreciate the way of life in America. One learns things better while comparing them with those in different surroundings.

MY CHILDHOOD

My parents came to Moscow during the First World War in 1915 and managed to get jobs at a munitions factory. That was how they got permission to live in Moscow. As is known, before 1917 Jews were not allowed to live in large cities, they had to live in the Pale of Settlement, which was introduced in Russia by Catherine II in 1772 after the first partition of Poland.

Only some categories of Jews had permits to live in cities: some merchants, craftsmen and people who worked for defense.

My parents came from Byelorussia. Father's birthplace was Kalinkovichi, mother's Babichi. Both places at that time were small towns. About my grandparents I know very little. They were dead before I was born. I sometimes heard my parents talk about the terrible lives my grandparents had to go through.

I was born in Moscow in October of 1918. Years later I learned that the place of my birth was somewhere near and opposite the Sandunovsky bathhouses in Moscow. The times were terrible. This period in the Soviet Union went down in history as Military Communism. Only one year passed after the Bolshevik revolution, officially called the

October revolution. Famine reigned: no foodstuffs, long bread lines, violent epidemics raged. The people were imprisoned and shot without trial. It was the period of a bloody civil war in Russia.

The Soviet money was devaluated many times and was practically not worth the paper it was printed on. Besides, during the Civil War, cities and towns often changed hands. One day it was the Reds, as we called them, i.e. Bolsheviks, who were masters of the city, and very unstable money was in circulation. The prices were inflated into millions of rubles, which were scornfully dubbed *lemons.* Some days later the whites, i.e. the remnants of the Tsarist army and all those who joined them in the struggle against Bolsheviks, occupied the city. The currency became different. During the time of the provisional government headed by A. Kerensky, "Kerenki" were in circulation.

At that time Dad fell ill with typhus. It was a miracle that he remained alive, he was very weak and could not move. In Moscow there was nothing to eat as before, the foodstuffs (the question was first of all about bread) could not be bought for love or money. So my parents came to the conclusion that there was no chance to survive in Moscow. Rumors were circulating that in the Ukraine it was better. The Ukraine was always considered the breadbasket of the country. Decision was taken not without the influence of mother's Uncle Mikhail to go to the Ukraine. My parents thought it would be a temporary stay just to keep body and soul together, as they say, and put on a little weight, both of them looking like skeletons. But we were not destined to return to Moscow.

I must mention here that Uncle Mikhail was the *evil genius* of our family. He had some influence on Dad, while Mom disliked him immensely. Paradoxical as it is, he was not only Mother's uncle but mine, too. The fact is, that he had married my aunt, Mother's sister Rebecca. In Moscow we shared the same apartment with Rebecca's family (Rebecca, Mikhail and their son, Grigory). It was on Mikhail's initiative that the decision was taken about a temporary *journey* to the Ukraine. Mother was against it, and very often afterwards in Kharkov when I could understand what is what, I overheard discussions and even quarrels between Mom and Dad about the foolish thing they did in having left Moscow. Mother considered it one of the most serious mistakes they had ever made. I often heard her say: "We shouldn't have left Moscow." As both Mom and Dad worked at a munitions factory at that time, they received from time to time very meager rations. When I was born, the director of the factory tried to help them as far as he could. I often heard from Mom the following touching story: When I was born the workers of the factory brought a sack of flour for my parents, and

the director brought some pieces of children's furniture for myself; his own children already grew up. Wasn't it very nice and generous of them? At that time a sack of flour was an unheard of treasure.

My mother was taking a very active part in the social work at the factory. Both mother and father worked at the factory office as accountants. Mother, however, wanted to acquire some working skills and become, as it were, part of the working class. The revolutionary ideas, the hopes for the better life, were widespread especially among the Jews, the doubly oppressed part of the population of Russia.

GOING TO THE UKRAINE

The decision of going for a short time to the Ukraine was nevertheless taken. It was the question of survival. Though the distance from Moscow to Kharkov is not longer than 500 miles, the journey to the Ukraine proved very difficult, to put it mildly.

It took us some days to get to Kharkov. Dad was on the stretcher after typhus. I was tied to mother with a towel not to be lost. I was only 14 months old at that time. We went by freight car, without any conveniences. To make the matter worse, a part of the roof of the car fell on us. It was a miracle we reached our destination at last.

A shabby apartment was rented by my parents together with Aunt Riva's family. To be sure, there were no conveniences, and Mother often sighed recollecting our nice apartment in the center of Moscow.

The principal concern now was to get food, chiefly bread. The first experience was not very encouraging. I remember it very dimly, mostly from the later talks about it. It was the first buy at the local market, a very appetizing loaf of bread. But, alas, when the loaf was cut and the mouths of all the members of the two families watered for it, a brick was found inside. The story was often referred to. It was considered quite instructive warning about possible cheats at the black market, the only place where it was possible to buy something to eat.

Another calamity began. The Ukraine was occupied by the White Army. As I mentioned before, it was the period of Civil War in Russia, and Kharkov changed hands several times. The Ukraine was not under Bolshevik rule till 1920. This time it was the troops of General Denikin that occupied Kharkov. The years 1918-1920 saw a

bloody struggle among Ukrainian nationalists, Red Army, White Army of Denikin, to say nothing of German intervention. The situation was tragic. Everywhere were arrests, many people were shot without trials and, as usual, pogroms took place in many parts of the country. In Tsarist Russia, pogroms were encouraged by the government, and the so-called *black hundreds* raged almost everywhere. At that time in the early twenties there were gangs of different creeds and the Jews as always were victims. Under the Denikinites, Dad had a very narrow escape. One day he didn't return from his work. It turned out that on the way home he was arrested. The reason was quite simple. Some acquaintance of his called him from the opposite side of the street. "Komissarchik, is that you?" Two White officers immediately ran up to father and with the words: "You are here, Bolshevist commissar?" They caught him and put him into prison, that is a dirty, overcrowded cellar where there were already many such prisoners.. The trials were very short, if they existed at all. More often people were shot without any trial. As they say in Russia: *bez soodah i sledstviya* (without any trial and judicial inquiry). It was a miracle that Dad remained alive and was freed. He somehow managed to prove that it was his name Komissarchik, that he was not a Bolshevik commissar. Many friends mobilized by Mom helped him.

After Soviet power was established in the Ukraine, Father went to Moscow in the hope of returning to our Moscow apartment or at least finding some of our belongings. But it was in vain. The apartment was robbed and occupied by some people. Father was not even allowed to enter it. And so we remained in Kharkov where my parents, my brother and I were destined to live most of our lives.

WE SETTLE IN THE UKRAINE

At the beginning, when we considered our stay in Kharkov temporary, we shared an apartment with mother's relatives. Besides the fact that the apartment was far from being convenient, it was necessary to find some apartment for our family to live in.

Using the word apartment, which corresponds approximately to the Russian word *Kvartira,* it wouldn't be out of place to mention substantial differences. After the Bolshevik Revolution, when the majority of rich people were either evicted from their apartments, or liquidated, or they left the country, many houses they had lived in became apartment houses with the so-called communal apartments. Communal apartments can hardly be called apartments at all, being nearer to a very unpleasant

hostel system.. The apartment formerly occupied by one family was given to many families, as a rule one room for a family. There were usually no conveniences: no central heating, no running water, to say nothing of bathrooms. If such conveniences had existed in some houses, they were in a state of complete negligence and didn't work. Kitchens, because of housing shortages, were very often given to families to live in, many houses being demolished during the Revolution and Civil War, others dilapidated with time. No construction of new houses or even repairs of old ones took place. The way of life in such *apartments* was called corridor system. It was like in hotels to some degree but either without any conveniences or with very poor ones shared by all the tenants of the communal apartment. Very often 30 persons shared one sink and one lavatory.

Life in such apartments was full of quarrels and even fights, some of which ended in a tragic way. It goes without saying that such houses were infested with bugs and roaches and rats. We kids didn't mind the corridor system. On the contrary, long corridors gave us room for playing *hide and seek* and other games, which irritated our neighbors greatly. In the corridors every family has a small stool or a bench with a primus (kerosene stove) on it to cook meals. All the preparatory work for it was done in the room. Some small storerooms or closets were built by the tenants in the corridors to add to the *living space* and keep many necessary things there such as kerosene, kitchen utensils, pails, firewood and some others.

The apartment my parents managed to rent was of the same kind, but had its own peculiarities. First of all, the whole floor for some unknown reason still belonged to a general, who was thus our landlord. Secondly the general didn't yet sell his furniture. So we lived in the so-called furnished rooms, and the furniture was not bad. We were the only family occupying two rooms; all our neighbors had one room for each family. One of our rooms was dark, the windows looking out on the staircase. Such luck of having two rooms may be accounted by the fact that one room gave access into another, and only one led to the corridor.

The windows that looked out on the staircase were the subject of my special pride: To all the neighbors, it was necessary to use the doorbell, which was one for all. There was a long list of tenants, and after every name it was indicated how many times one was to push the button to be admitted to this or that tenant. We, I mean our family, had our own 'personal' window which we and our visitors used for knocking at instead of using the bell. By the way, the doorbell was one of the main causes of quarrels: nobody wanted to open the door for his neighbor's visitors. It was the communal apartments

that gave rise to the following saying which is at variance with the well-known biblical maxim about one's neighbors: "I love all the world minus my neighbors."

At first, the apartment we rented from the general was furnished and we had almost all the necessary pieces of furniture. But very soon the situation changed: The general decided to emigrate and he began to sell things, furniture included. One fine day, it was in the early twenties, we found ourselves, as they say in Russian, among four walls. Mother's nice fur coat (luckily my parents had taken it with them, hoping it would be worth some loaves of bread) was put on the floor to become my bed! I don't remember how my parents managed; there was a lot of room on the floor, though. The first purchases made some years after were: two beds, a table and two stools. Everything was second-hand, of course. One bed, intended for me, was made of iron. It was of the normal size for the adult so that it should serve me for a long time to come. As they say in Russian *na vyrost,* that is, with room for growth. The bed for my parents was wider and even had some parts nickeled, which was considered at that time a luxury.

Our house was an old building without any conveniences except a very unreliable running water system. In the rooms there were stoves which were heated with firewood and coal. Sometimes some neighbors would break up large pieces of coal and split wood in the corridor, which did not contribute to good sanitary conditions in the whole communal apartments. It was done in spite of the protests of other neighbors and led to loud quarrels. About half of the windows of the house looked upon staircases so that many rooms were dark and could be aired only through corridors. Every floor with about 5-7 or more families had one toilet room. The flushing never worked. So usually every family has a special pail which was taken to the room in case of necessity and then placed in the corridor. It didn't make the atmosphere in the corridor better, which was already full of steam and dirt and different smells from the primuses. The pails of all the house were emptied in the yard lavatory, and this public convenience, if it might be called in this way, was so dirty, so full of mud and filth that children were not allowed to come near it. There were also terrible basements in the house, very damp and very deep in the ground, so that windows were not seen from the street. Here, too, people lived. There were many houses like the one we lived in.

When we moved to this house, there were rumors that the house must be soon pulled down and a new one built in its place. Some of our friends and acquaintances considered my parents to be mad to rent an apartment in such a house. Forestalling the events, I must mention here that we moved to a separate apartment in 1931, and the house of my childhood was pulled down in 1986 only.

With all the shortcomings of our apartment, in which we lived till 1931, we kids enjoyed our dirty yard and many additional pitiable buildings (sheds, cellars, etc.) which served well for different games. However dilapidated and dirty the house we lived in was, we kids liked it and even now I recollect it with tenderness. After the Second World War in 1945, when we returned to Kharkov, our house was still standing, if not proudly but simply housing many people, among them I found only one family that I knew before the war, the rest either perished, died of hunger during the German occupation, or moved to other places. There was only one positive feature I noticed about the house. The terrible damp and rotten basements where people had lived were empty. No one lived there any more. It does not mean that people did not live in other basements. What I said referred only to our house and to houses like it. The basements, a little bit better, still housed many poor people. In 1986 I learned that the house had been pulled down. I could not help going to say good-bye to it. I found but heaps of broken bricks and rubble.

OUR NEIGHBORS

If I close my eyes, I see almost all the tenants of our house. Karp Ivanovich, our *dvornik* (janitor), clad in the uniform janitors used to wear before the revolution of 1917 and shouting at us children for making disorders and being in his way while he was cleaning the yard and part of the street adjoining to our house and being under his charge. After my mother read to me the famous story by I. Turgenev entitled *MuMu*," a very touching narration about a dumb serf janitor, I associated Karp Ivanovich with the hero of the story. He was a widower, had a son Pavel, who after his father's death became a thief and finished his life in prison. He was my peer and in childhood took part in our games. Anna, a laundress, lived in the basement with her son Kolya. He became a cripple after some gang of teenagers had beaten him almost to death. The second beating he never survived. On the first and the second floors of our house, -- there were two floors and a basement in it, -- there lived many Jewish families who had come from the Pale after the revolution. I had many friends among their children and grandchildren. Especially friendly I was with two girls, one Jewish and the other Russian. The former later became a doctor and after the war moved to Leningrad, the latter became a wife of an important party official. I saw her in Moscow before emigrating but never told her about my intentions, which at that time were considered anti-Soviet and treacherous.

There were many nice people in our house and in some neighboring ones, but I'll never forget our neighbors, the Tverskoys, who lived on the 1st floor. Being now, as it were, a permanent resident of Milwaukee and seeing many disabled people in their wheelchairs, I see that couple vividly with my mental eye. The name of the woman was Bassya Pavlovna. If I were a writer, I would write a novel about her and her husband. It is a story of love and devotion at the time of tremendous hardships they had to live through.

Bassya was a cripple, with both her legs paralyzed. When she had been twelve, she had met with an accident. While skating she fell down and damaged her spine. Since that time she had been bed-ridden and nothing could be done about it. Tverskoy (his first name has slipped my memory) was a frequent visitor at Bassya's family apartment, had known her before the accident and he took to her with all his heart. To the great dismay and frustration of his mother, he married Bassya and brought her to Kharkov. The couple lived on the first floor of our house described above. They occupied two rooms in the communal apartment. As in our case, one room was dark with a window giving on the staircase and the other with a window overlooking the street. In the dark room lived Mr. Tverskoy's mother, who cursed her handicapped and bedridden daughter-in-law day and night. She prayed that she could live to see Bassya dead. By her behavior she didn't help to make the life of the couple easier, to be sure. But it was necessary to mention the newly-weds did not seem to pay much attention to her. At least one could very often hear the mother's shouting and cursing and never could hear Bassya or her husband raising their voices or talking back. In fact, they stood her attacks quite courageously.

Mr. Tverskoy was a student of a technical college at that time. All household duties were also upon him, like preparing meals, cleaning the room, washing up and certainly taking good care of his Bassya. Nobody ever heard him complain about his lot; he always spoke about his wife with great warmth and respect. Bassya was no ordinary woman. She was very intelligent and well-read. She tried to help her husband in every way she could. Being bed-ridden she was making some small boxes for sale. It was in the period of NEP (New Economic Policy proclaimed by Lenin) when such activities were temporarily permissible. It goes without saying that they were poor like almost all around us.

Every evening, the weather permitting, Tverskoy used to close the front door of the house, put a wicker arm chair at the entrance and, bringing Bassya in his arms, seat her comfortably. When she was in the armchair, her legs covered with some blanket or a

warm kerchief, the front door opened and we kids could see her very tidily and nicely clad with a pleasant smile on her lips.

We liked her very much. She was not like other women in our house. She was very good-looking, very friendly, always ready and glad to tell us some fairy tales of which she knew a lot. I must confess that Mr. Tverskoy often gave us candies urging us to sit near Bassya and to entertain her a little. Those 'tips' helped. We tried to suppress for a while our desire to run, play hide and seek and other games. Bassya understood us well and after the fairy tale with a happy ending was over, she used to say, "And now, children, you must run and I'll see who can run faster." She didn't have to ask us twice.

Once in a fortnight Tverskoy used to take Bassya to some theater. He had to bring her half an hour before the performance began, Bassya didn't want people to see her helpless and carried by her husband. When the people began to come to the auditorium she was already sitting in the box, very nicely dressed with the proud smile on her beautiful face.

Here I would like to underline that there were no wheelchairs in the Soviet Union at that time, and there are none at present either. Recently an American correspondent in Moscow speaking over the radio dwelled on this phenomenon and wondered at the complete absence of wheelchairs in Moscow. It makes Bassya's case unique.

In 1922, when Lenin was very seriously ill, a team of German doctors was invited to the U.S.S.R. Mr. Tverskoy, though poor, managed to take Bassya to Moscow to show her to foreign specialists. The doctors said the operation was necessary, warning they could not guarantee favorable results and said that even a lethal outcome was possible. Mr. Tverskoy was about to agree to this, but Bassya said: "We'll not risk it." Though at that time I was too small to understand what is what, but I often heard parents speak about the Tverskoys, with whom they were on friendly terms.

In 1931 we at last received our cooperative and separate (in Russian we call it *isolated*) apartment. We moved to another part of the city and didn't hear anything about the couple. The end of this dramatic story I learned many years later, in the seventies. Mother met Mr. Tverskoy on the street and it turned out we lived in the same district. Mother said it was difficult to recognize in this old man the former Tverskoy full of energy and always busy with some errands. But still they did recognize each other. He was a widower. Bassya died after the war. He never remarried. They had no children and some distant relative was taking care of him. He had managed to evacuate Bassya

from Kharkov before the Germans occupied the city. During the war they lived somewhere in the Urals. After returning to Kharkov he (after being for some years on the waiting list) received a separate apartment with conveniences. At that time he was already a doctor with letters after his name. He had entered a medical college in the hope to help his Bassya. When I was leaving the Soviet Union, I learned about Mr. Tverskoy's death.

WE ARE JEWS

In 1922 we had to live through a very terrible disaster. As is known, Russia was always famous for its anti-Semitism and pogroms. After the October Revolution of 1917, the so-called brotherhood of nations was proclaimed. The Pale of settlement was abolished. Unfortunately many bands continued their dirty work. The age-long anti-Semitic tendencies characteristic of Russia contributed to it. Ironically enough, Stalin was appointed the commissar (now they have ministers) of nationalities. This *specialist* in the national problems never ceased to be beastly anti-Semitic, but in the early twenties and later before the German invasion into Russia, he very skillfully hid his real feelings. Later on it was revealed that he had shown some German high officials our concentration (labor) camps and even read and approved Hitler's notorious book *Mein Kampf.*

After the Revolution, many Jews moved from the Pale to cities and towns. As ill luck would have it, the majority of relatives on my mother's side remained in the "*klein shtetle,* Ruchayovka in Belorussia, somewhere near Gomel. They were my mother's sisters and brothers with their children and grandchildren. In 1922, during a terrible pogrom, all of them were murdered in the most brutal way. Only one of them, Gershen by name, who had been sent by his mother (my mother's sister) to Gomel to rent an apartment, survived. Recently he died in Cleveland, where he emigrated from Moscow in 1984.

I was too small at that time to understand the tragic situation, but I couldn't help noticing Mom's swollen eyes usually full of tears. Only later on I learned all the particulars of those tragic events.

Among the survivals from Ruchayovka was also a young girl, Hanah by name. She came to Kharkov and rented a small room in our house. She could not forget all the horrors she had lived through. She lost her parents and relatives. Soon she committed suicide, hanging herself in her room. I remember that day well. It happened on my fifth

birthday. Mother sent me to Hanah to borrow some plates, cups and cutlery. I knocked at her door, but nobody answered. When the door was forced and opened, Hanah was dead. She was twenty-two years old. There were many suicides in our street, but that one oppressed me greatly.

In Kalinkovichi, my father's birthplace, the situation at that time was also dangerous: the black bands (they were called *"black hundreds"*) were widespread. But in Kalinkovichi, as in many other klein shtetles, a self-defense detachment was formed. The idea of self-defense detachments was suggested by L. Trotsky. Many messengers used to come to him from different shletles asking for help and protection. Trotsky, who was at that time Commissar of Defense, could not render any real help because the newly created Red Army he was organizer of was fighting at many fronts, and a civil war was raging. However, his idea about self-defense detachments worked in many places, and so it did in Kalinkovichi. Many years later, in seventies, eighties and even now in some anti-Semitic publications like those of *Pamyat* and others, encouraged by the Soviet authorities, it was stated that is was not Jews who were the victims of pogroms, but the Russians whom the Jews allegedly killed. I learned about these detachments not only from literary sources, but also from Yudel Komissarchik, Uncle Osher's son and my father's cousin and namesake. He was at the head of such a detachment in Kalinkovichi in the early twenties.

OUR OUTSTANDING NEIGHBORS

Our house was very old and built by an unknown architect in a very bad way, as I mentioned above. Besides, for a very long time nothing has been done in the way of repair. However, in the yard of the house there was a kind of side building in which there were two apartments of much better quality and better arrangement of rooms. Those apartments were usually given by the local authorities to some outstanding people. In early twenties, one of the apartments was occupied by academician P. Tychina, who was writing verses in Ukrainian glorifying the Soviet regime. We had to learn those verses by heart at school, which was far from being pleasant. In late twenties in one of the apartments lived the famous Yiddish poet Lev Kvitko with his wife Bertha, a very accomplished pianist, and daughter Eve. They had immigrated from Germany. Kvitko wrote many lovely verses in Yiddish, which were translated into Russian, Ukrainian and into other languages. His daughter was of my age and I used to come to them to play together. The Kvitkos had much more room for children's games and they were very tolerant and kind to us children. Their housemaid was of a different opinion though, and more than once expressed her displeasure at our

sometimes noisy games which contributed little to the order in the rooms.

As is known, Lev Kvitko, this very honest, friendly and talented man, was brutally killed by the order of Stalin together with other outstanding representatives of Yiddish literature and art in 1952.

The second apartment was occupied by V. Hozovits' sister Regina. She was a pianist and taught students at Kharkov conservatory. There were rumors that Vladimir Horovits wanted his sister to emigrate from the Soviet Union, but she would not. Her husband was a well known economist, E. Liberman. In the seventies he was proclaimed the *man of the year* in the United States. It irritated Soviet authorities greatly, and he had a lot of troubles. Liberman was a professor of economics at Kharkov University and was the first to suggest that the concept of *profit* be introduced into the Soviet science of economics. Regina's daughter Lena was present at the concert Vladimmir Horovits gave in Moscow recently. I saw her on TV among the people at the concert hall. Regina Horovits, Evsei Liberman and Regina's daughter are already dead.

The house we lived in was in no way an attractive building and neither were the majority of houses on our street. But next to our house there stood a house quite different from other houses. Built of yellow bricks with nice jambs and lintels, with loggias and balconies in a good style, it looked very impressive. But what attracted us children most of all was a back garden with fountains, statues, flower beds and many shady trees. The garden was surrounded by a high brick fence, and the kids of our house and the neighboring ones were not allowed to enter it. Sometimes we managed to penetrate there though. It happened when the janitor in charge of the house was either absent or dead drunk. But it was not often that we were in this wonderful garden because the tenants themselves did not approve of our coming and saw to it that we were kept outside. Those tenants were important people: professors of the technological college situated nearby, outstanding engineers who had not emigrated and remained loyal to the Soviet power and worked conscientiously for the good of the country, and some party bosses. The fate of those specialists was very tragic. At the end of the twenties the majority of them were arrested and executed. They had been charged with sabotage and wrecking at the Donets Basin mines. Only after Stalin's death, in the period of *glasnost*, it was revealed that they were innocent. House #19 (that was its number) became an ordinary house, the fence was removed, the flower beds neglected, the fountains destroyed, the house itself in disrepair. In fact, there was nothing to admire now. The families of the so-called *enemies of the people* had been evicted, some of them arrested and sent to the camps, others committed suicide.

Before leaving the country in 1987 I went to say good-bye to the street of my childhood, to the houses and yards we used to play at. The house #19 (now it was #17), because the house we lived in was demolished and numeration was changed) was still there. There remained very little of its former beauty and attraction, and I felt sad about it. God knows why.

Not far from our house there was the so-called technological garden. It was a very nice place for walking and playing. In fact, it was not a garden at all but a very nice park in which the buildings of one of the oldest Kharkov colleges were situated, Kharkov Technological College. Kharkov, it may be noted is not a very ancient city. It is a little over 350 years old. Kharkov University, in which I studied and later worked, was founded in 1804.

The park we liked very much. It had many shadowy trees, bushes, nice clearings covered with grass, flowers and benches to sit on. I recollect this park with great warmth. We children called it in a caressing way *"technolǫzhka."* At the beginning I went there with my Mom when she had some time to spare. Later on I was allowed to go there by myself and with other children. I was especially fond of the so-called *krugly sâdik* i.e., little round garden where there was a pile of sand for children to play with. I don't remember any playgrounds for children, they appeared long after World War II.

I recollect the American film "One-Potato, Two-Potato" (It's a back translation from Russian; foreign films are usually dubbed in the Soviet Union). In this film I saw for the first time a nice playground for children; with different small, brightly painted houses, ladders, and many other nice structures. We usually played in our dirty yard or just on the sidewalk, bringing out our dolls and other simple toys. Childhood is childhood. And poor as we were, we children didn't notice it because so were almost all of our neighbors, many of them even on a lower level comparing with us.

The less happy part of my childhood began when mother began to work, too. Dad's salary was not enough even for bare necessities. It was arranged by Mom that I should spend all the day with a family that lived nearby. It was no ordinary family, but one of bigwigs. The father was an important party functioner. He did not live with the family though, but supported them. His wife and the only son, Karl, approximately of my age, occupied the whole one-story house. It was for the first time in my life that I found myself in such a rich house. There were seven or eight rooms in it, all conveniences, a very large veranda and a back garden. All the rooms were very nicely and richly

furnished. There was a special room for Karl and his toys, i.e., a nursery.

The family of two persons had two servants: a cook and a nursery-governess *(bonna* in Russian). I was to bring a sandwich with me and was to be given a cup of tea or coffee for lunch. The bonna was a lady of 30 or 35 years of age, well-clad and well-mannered. She often read fairy tales to us, told us interesting stories and took us for a walk to the above-mentioned technological garden. She was very kind to me and I liked her very much. Still I was not very happy in this rich house because when Karl and I were left alone at home for some time, Karl used to beat me and to push me into the dark bathroom and lock me up there. He was reprimanded for such behavior but he didn't care. In most cases I didn't complain; I was afraid he would beat me stronger. The bonna was also supposed to teach us German, but she never did.

Everything comes to an end. I began at last to attend a kindergarten. There were very few of them at that time, but Dad managed to settle me in one. It was a very nice place intended only for children whose parents were participants of the October revolution of 1917. I gradually accustomed to the place with very nice rooms and a large garden and enjoyed being with other children. Besides, the food given there was nice and the payment for the kindergarten was reasonable.

NEP BEGINS

It was the beginning of the so-called NEP, New Economic Policy, i.e. some capitalist forms of economy were allowed. Private property and private initiative was encouraged. It began approximately in 1923-24. Though I was a child, I remember it well. Before NEP, terrible famine and shortages of everything were everywhere. In a year's time just a miracle happened. The markets became full of goods and foodstuffs.

Near us there was a small private shop, and Mother sometimes sent me to buy some butter or something else. I was always glad to do it because the owner of the shop used to give me a couple of candies free of charge, thanking me for coming and telling me to come again.

In 1923 on the eve of the NEP we (Mom and me, Aunt Gissya with her daughter Beba) went to Berdyansk, -- now it is called Osipenko in commemoration of a famous woman pilot. It is a small Ukrainian town situated near the Azov sea.

Dad remained in Kharkov to work. He came later on for two weeks to rest a little and to help us return. It was a very difficult journey. It took us long to get there and back. We traveled on a cart driven by horses. I will not go into details of our stay there, I can only say it was fun. What was quite instructive is that we went there hungry with very little supply of food and we returned with a lot of different foodstuffs, -- bread, flour, honey, butter, vegetables, fruits and so on, -- all in big pails and packages. It was like a miracle and it was the result of the NEP. People were allowed to work for themselves, private property became legal and people worked with enthusiasm hoping for a better life.

The question arises why it is so different now with Gorbachev's *perestroika*. There are many reasons, but the principal three, as it seems to me, are:

1. there are many restrictions in the way to restructuring;
2. the Soviet people lost their faith in those who are their leaders and their oppressors and lost their faith in communism;
3. they are out of habit to work productively, having no stimulus.

I remember seeing a play depicting the early twenties. Lenin was still alive and it was before NEP. The workers toiled for more than 12 hours a day, having very little reward for their labor. When Lenin met some workers and asked them why they should work so hard receiving nothing in return, they answered, "We believe in the Soviet power and we work for the bright future of our country." Certainly, it was propaganda. But for the time described in the play it was more or less true to life.

LETTERS FROM THE USA

In our not so bright present, letters from America (as father used to put it *fun yam*) occupied a very special place. They were like rays of light in our quite dull life. My parents read and reread them, discussed and made comments. The letters written in Yiddish were also translated into Russian for some nearest friends and, it goes without saying, I was an eager listener. Those letters from Milwaukee were for the most part written by Uncle Shimon, Father's brother. Uncle Shimon with his wife Rachel and his older brother Zusl had emigrated from Russia in 1912. Uncle Zusl also wrote to us from time to time, but not so regularly as Uncle Shimon did. As I understand it now those letters meant a lot to my parents and they were a great moral support for them in their very hard life. An episode comes to mind, when Mom and Dad even quarreled and the quarrel was connected with a letter from America. Mom took with her the letter

received on the previous day when she went for a walk with me. She wanted to reread it attentively while I would be playing nearby. She became so absorbed in reading that for some time she stopped watching my activities. Meanwhile I found a pile of rubbish with many pieces of broken glass in it. Numerous blacks and blues and bruises, my falling into that pile, were the reason of my parents quarrel. I heard Dad say something to the effect that the only daughter was neglected by her mother.

I FALL SERIOUSLY ILL

In 1925 I fell ill. Our district physician said it was nothing serious, simply *grippe* as we call it in Russian, i.e., flu. The diagnosis proved wrong; it was an attack of appendicitis. As it was not taken care of at once, it turned into peritonitis, pus began to spread over the body. The pains in the stomach were terrible, excruciating. My stomach became hard as glass and I was crying with pain day and night. On the third day I was taken to the hospital. Since I was small, mother was allowed to be with me. She slept beside me on the floor. Here I must mention by the way that at that time as well as at present, health service in the Soviet Union is on the lowest level. If the patient's relatives or friends don't take care of him or her, the patient is almost completely neglected (no decent food, no care). In my case, the surgery was out of the question and the doctors said there was very little chance for me to survive. To make the matters worse, there were no antibiotics at that time. I will remember to my dying day the wonderful doctor who helped me to remain alive. It was Dr. Beltz, a German by origin. He decided to prepare me in some way for the operation. For this purpose it was necessary to get rid of the pus in my body. He thought fasting might do it. I was not given anything to eat for seventeen day,s and even water was given to me in very limited quantities; very often they just wetted my lips. I had no appetite, so it was all right with me. But after such *dieting*, on the eighteenth day the appetite appeared. The pus was probably resolved gradually and left my poor body. My appearance was far from being attractive. When some parents' friends came to visit me in the hospital, they could not hide their fright. My hair came out, I could not walk and was as thin as a skeleton. Skin and bones, it is called in Russian. But I began to eat. Mother was allowed to use a small spirit stove in the hospital to prepare something for me to eat. I was allowed to eat every two hours, but the portions were at first minuscule. Every quarter of an hour I used to inquire about the time and demanded to be given something to eat. Mother was smiling through tears, being delighted with my appetite, but she certainly adhered to the schedule prescribed by Dr. Beltz. However, I could not be operated on immediately because I was very weak. The doctor recommended some good rest in the

countryside before the surgery.

Here Dad took a very courageous and a very risky step. It was done for my sake. As he could not afford to send me to some sanatorium, neither could he send me to the countryside with Mom, he decided to give up his work in town and look for some job in the nearest countryside. He found a temporary job in a suburban rest home. This rest home was certainly not a sanatorium, but a very modest establishment for workers and employees to rest during their short leave of two weeks. In every room five or six persons were accommodated. The meals were modest but satisfactory. There were different entertainments, and twice a week a film was shown in a local club. But the most important thing about the place was that it was very nice here. Pomérki, it was the name of the place, was a village near Kharkov, now it is a part of the city. The village was full of greenery with many fruit orchards in it and woods around.

Both Mother and Father worked in the accounting office and I was in the open air all day long, sitting in my wicker chair. No wheelchairs existed in Russia at that time either. I liked the place immensely. Since my parents worked, a relative on my mother's side came to live with us. Pasha, that was her name, was seventeen. She escaped the pogrom described above because at that time she was visiting some friends in another *"klein shtetl"*. My parents had invited her to live with us for some time so that she could help Mother and study at an evening school. She did not care much about studying but she did help Mother to look after me. Pasha and I became great friends. She enjoyed playing different games not less that I did, though there was ten years difference between us. She lived with us for three years and then got married and left us. Mother found her after the war and they were in correspondence. In 1976 after the death of my husband (Mother died in 1971) I went to Driepropetrovsk to see Pasha. She was very ill at that time. Her three sons made their way in life. One became a doctor, the second an engineer and the third a mechanic, all married, and Pasha had four grandchildren.

So I was in Pasha's charge. Everything was excellent. My health was improving speedily. The children who lived nearby, at first scared by my appearance, hairless and extremely skinny as I was, became very kind to me and tried even to entertain me. Sometimes they invented games that I could take part in, confined to my chair, though. We had a separate apartment in Pomerki since Mom and Dad were on the staff of the rest home. We also received meals from the rest home kitchen for which we didn't pay much; the members of the staff had a discount.

The only sad point about our staying in Pomerki was Mother's poor health. She

could not eat. Every time she tried to eat something, she threw it up. He face and neck were covered with brown spots. I was too small to understand the situation. My anxious questions Mother answered, "Don't worry, you'll have a brother." Mother was pregnant and because of my uncertain state of health, no abortion was made.

Soon I was on my feet again and regained my hair which became very dark and wavy. When Karl was born in 1926, I was able to help Mother nurse him.

The second summer we were also in Pomerki, I was already after the operation for appendicitis. Dr. Beltz had insisted on the operation and he was right. It turned out that a lot of pus had remained inside my body. They couldn't even put in stitches, the pus was to be let out.

Dad was again working in the rest home office. Mom had to quit the work because of the baby who was named Karl - probably after Karl Marx or after the boy I spent some years of childhood with.

I enjoyed being in Pomerki. It was a wonderful place to spend spring and summer at. One more good point about Pomerki was the possibility to save some money and buy some furniture. At the rest home there was a carpenter, and he was on friendly terms with Father. So he agreed to make the necessary pieces of furniture for our Kharkov apartment, which was almost empty except for beds, a wobbly table and a couple of very old unattractive chairs. Certainly, Father was to pay for all these luxuries, but the prices were reasonable and now we could afford it. My wish for a special piece of furniture was not neglected either, and I received a real desk like those used in real school rooms. I was very pleased and proud to have this desk. A wardrobe, a cupboard, a new table with six chairs appeared in our Kharkov apartment. All the things were very modest but they seemed very nice and attractive to us. The old table became an auxiliary one, a kitchen table so that now Mother could prepare everything on this table. In the corridor there was no room for it. A small stool with a primus on it was all that could be put there. The new table was put in the center of our dark room, it was covered with a white tablecloth and the room and even the whole apartment became lighter and more attractive.

The picture wouldn't be complete unless I mention one more thing Father did for me. The two rooms we had were separated from each other by a large window to give some light to the dark room, door and one more opening place between that door and a large stove which served both for heating the rooms and for cooking in winter. In the yard

we had a place in the barn for coal and wood for our stove. Father liquidated the window panes and the door between the rooms. In the latter he arranged for me a swing. That was really a thing!

FATHER BECOMES UNEMPLOYED

Alas! Everything comes to an end. Our two years' stay in Pomerki was over. The rest home was closed and Father was left without work, i.e., became unemployed. At that time unemployment was officially acknowledged. There was even a labor exchange and allowances were given to the jobless. The allowances were so meager that it was next to impossible to make both ends meet. To find a job was also very difficult. For about a year Father could not find anything. As a result all our nice furniture was sold piece by piece, including my school desk I was so proud of. When a woman came with her son to see the desk and the boy began trying to sit at my desk, I was ready to kill him and started crying at the top of my voice. But it didn't help, the desk was sold.

I used to go with Dad to the Labor Exchange, which was in the center of the city (in Russian *downtown* is called the center of the city, or simply *the center*). At present the building was given to conservatory. Though now, too, there are unemployed, and quite recently in the epoch of *glasnost* it was officially admitted that there are many unemployed in the Soviet Union, no allowances are paid. If a worker is fired he is paid for two weeks in advance, the so-called discharge pay.

But to return to my story, Dad had been unemployed for about a year. Our apartment became empty once more. And the life became very gloomy for my parents. As to me, I enjoyed walking with Dad. He had now more time to devote to children, but he joked and told me stories less often than I was accustomed to. And he was such a good hand at telling stories.

At last Dad found a job at some establishment dealing with forests. There is a proverb in Russian that the trouble never comes alone which corresponds to the English, "It never rains but it pours". Mom fell seriously ill and was taken to the hospital. Something became very wrong with her liver after she gave birth to Karl. With short intervals she was in hospitals for more than a year. Karl and I were in Pasha's charge. To be sure, Pasha was not very happy about it. She was eighteen and was fond of enjoying herself. Instead she was busy day and night with two kids not always obedient and disciplined. But what could she do? She was an orphan and had a terrible

stepmother (as I learned from her later on) and was ready to go anywhere rather than stay with the woman who treated her badly and whom she hated.

I was not an easy period of life for my father and Pasha. Every day Father had to go to the hospital to bring some foods to Mother. Some meals were served at the hospital, but they were so poor that it was necessary to bring something really nutritious to the patients, the more so that Mother had to be on a special diet. It goes without saying that it was necessary to do shopping, to stand in lines for these foodstuffs, to buy something at the market and to prepare the meals. Karl and I, with Pasha to be sure, went to see Mother every weekend."

At last Mother returned from the hospital. At first she was too weak to do something about the house, but gradually all the household, all the chores were in mother's hands. Mother was not accustomed to be at home doing nothing. Pasha was made to attend the evening classes more diligently than she had done before. She was not very happy about it and soon decided to leave us. She went to some *klein shtetle,* married there and then lived with her husband first in the countryside and then in Driepropetrovsk.

I GO TO SCHOOL

In 1927 I went to school. I began to attend school only when I was nine years old. At that time the admission age was eight years, but in 1926 I was seven years and ten months and I was not admitted and studied at home. The next year, parents wanted me to attend the second grade but it was not allowed. It was very boring for me to attend the first grade, because I could already read and write Russian, was not bad at arithmetic. In a word, my three R's were good. Gradually I came to like my school very much. It was staffed with very experienced teachers; some of them worked before the revolution in the gymnasia house in the same premises. After the revolution it became school #1 named after Lenin. At that time we, the pupils of the school, were very proud of it. I got accustomed to school, studied very well and even helped the teacher to study with those pupils (in Russian the word student is used only with reference to those studying in colleges) who were lagging behind. I was certainly flattered by this. The only trouble with my school years was the pedologists who at that time were in charge of all the schools. Many schools for retarded children were organized. From time to time, quizzes were given to us by pedologists. Their appearance at school we dreaded a lot. About 40 per cent of the schoolchildren of our school were transferred to those special schools for retarded pupils. The pedologists gave us very sophisticated quizzes

having very little to do with what we studied at school. The questions and puzzles we were given were considered essential for evaluating our so-called I.Q. In the thirties, a Party decree was issued in which pedology was unmasked as a bourgeois science, and the whole army of pedologists were to be retaught in pedagogics.

There were many more experiments carried out at schools, but thanks to good teachers in our school and thanks to my parents, who watched thoroughly what I studied at school, I managed to finish the seven-year school with good knowledge of the Russian language and all other subjects studied at school minus German, which was taught on a very low level and nobody knew anything. I owe a lot to my mother, who was a great book-lover. Many nice stories and novels, which were either unavailable or banned by the Soviet authorities, I knew from my mother's wonderful renditions. Mother was a graduate of a gymnasia, though of course as an external student: for Jews there existed a very strict quota of five percent. Father could not manage to enter gymnasium, though he was giving lessons, working as a private tutor. But he himself could not pass the exams because of the special anti-Semitic attitude of the examiners.

WE ARE PUT ON A WAITING LIST

Our housing conditions remained the same. The same old house, the same absence of basic conveniences. But a ray of light appeared on the horizon. Up till 1927 no new houses were built and the old ones had not been repaired for a long time. In 1927 they began to organize cooperatives for building houses with what they call in Russian *isolated* apartments, i.e., an apartment for one family only, and with conveniences to boot. Those apartments were certainly a far cry from American apartments in apartment houses. In them at that time there were no closets, no refrigerators, no cupboards, to say nothing about elevators, though they were usually four or five-storied buildings. The houses were built in accordance with strict economy. We had to begin paying for our future apartment in advance for four years while the house was in the process of construction and then for thirty years more in the capacity of tenants and afterwards even owners of this cooperative apartment. My parents had been dreaming about such an apartment for a long time. So they came to the decision. Dad was enlisted as a future tenant and we had to begin paying the installments. But where is the money to be taken, that was a big question. Mother did not work at that time because of baby Karl. Father's salary was hardly enough to make both ends meet. The only way out was to take a tenant, i.e., to sublet a corner in our dark room to some decent person. Many people had no place to live, -- there were homeless, -- so it was not

difficult to find an *uglovik*. The word means a subtenant occupying a corner in the room (the Russian for *corner* is *ugol*). I would like to mention here that at the time in question there was no passport system. No permit for residence was necessary. With the introduction of passport system in late thirties the problem of homelessness was "solved." The homeless, the people having no residence permit, were deported from cities. It was like a vicious circle, -- to get a residence permit one must have a place to live.

Our first *uglovik* was an acquaintance of Father's . He was a young man who worked at an office and studied in the evening. He occupied a corner in the dark room which was at the same time our living room and also the room we passed through. His bed and a little table were partitioned from that rest of the room by a screen. He paid 30 rubles a month, which was exactly the sum we had to pay for our future apartment per month..

And that was a beginning of a very important and unpleasant period for me. The fact is that Semyon, that was our tenant's first name, was very grateful to my parents for having a place to live in. He was a very enterprising person. Besides working and studying, he had a mistress older than himself, a professor's wife. The professor was often out of town on some mission and even was sometimes sent abroad. Our Semyon was his substitute. He was very nicely dressed in good suits of foreign make, which at that time happened very rarely. I often overheard the talks he had with Dad and began to understand things.

Being very grateful for having a place to live, he wanted to do something for us. Besides studying at some evening classes Semyon also studied English. It was very clever and foreseeing of him. At that time only German was taught at schools. His perseverance in studying served him well in his future carrier. His background was perfect from the point of view of Soviet authorities. A Ukrainian from a peasant family, he became a member of the Communist Party and was a hard working man in addition. He eventually became a professor in social sciences, i.e., Marxism-Leninism, and worked at Kharkov University. He left his mistress and married a young girl, a student of the University. To be sure, he already had an apartment, but we met him now and then. In the late thirties he disappeared as many other people. Probably he was sent to a labor camp. It is true that he had a *"long tongue"*, as they say in Russian. He was not very careful about what and with whom he was talking.

So in 1927 Semyon began to teach me English. I was not very happy about it. He was not a very experienced teacher, neither did he know English well, but he was very

demanding and made me copy the whole pages of the textbook we used. And that was at the time when I could not write well in Russian. I disliked our lessons immensely, would pronounce the English words in the wrong way on purpose to irritate my tutor and to make him give up our lessons. But being eager to please my father, Semyon went on with our lessons. Fortunately for me, soon he managed to get roomlet in a faraway district of the city, and our lessons came to an end. But those first lessons were not in vain. When some years later I began to study English seriously they stood me in good stead. Now I recollect my first steps in English and my first English teacher with gratitude.

Now we had to take new tenants. They were our distant relatives on Father's side. It was a young couple. They occupied the whole dark room. And as the young woman was a pianist, their piano, for which there was no place in the dark room, was put into our room. My parents did not mind because Dad wanted me to learn to play the piano, and we didn't have one. Dad was very musical, he learned to play the violin by himself. The violin had to be sold in the hard times when our existence was, so to speak, from hand to mouth.

I was not very happy with our new tenants, though they tried to be kind to me. I didn't like that it was Mother who had to heat the stove and Father had to bring coal and wood from the barn. Maybe such was the agreement, but I didn't consider it just. Besides, before it was only Mom who very gently protested when I was bringing my friends to play in our apartment. Now it was the new lady who expressed displeasure at the noise we children made and the dirt we brought from the street. I may add that our two rooms became very crowded with things and people, there was almost no room for play. To be sure, with some of our neighbors in our communal apartment it was still worse, but six persons in two rooms was quite enough.

In addition the Levins (that was the family name of our tenants) almost constantly quarreled. As far as I could understand, the cause of most of their quarrels was their relatives. The question they were trying to solve was on whose side the in-laws were worse. As I have mentioned above, our rooms were divided by curtains only. There was no door which could be closed, so everything was heard. At first they were ashamed to quarrel when my parents were at home; to us kids they paid no attention. But as time went on they didn't mind my parents and continued their debates even if Mom and Dad were at home.

WE SECURE OUR APARTMENT

At last our dream came true and we received the keys from our new apartment. It happened in 1931. Karl was already four years old and I was eleven.

I remember that day very well, as if it happened today. Karl and I were taken to parents' friends, not to be in the way of the procedure of moving. A cart with a horse was hired to carry our modest belongings to the new apartment. There was one more ticklish circumstance about which I learned later on. Father had managed quite lawfully to change the rent documents so that after our departure the Levins could go on living in the apartment not as subtenants but as lawful tenants. It was not an easy task for Dad, though at that time, according to the law, a subtenant who lived in the given apartment for not less than three years acquired the right to go on living there and could not be evicted. At present this law was canceled and however long the subtenant lives in the apartment he has no right to remain there after the so-called principal tenants leave.

The Levins promised Dad some help with the payments for our new apartment. But they never did.

When our belongings were already on the cart, a real scandal began. The tenants from the basements rushed to our apartment trying to throw out the Levins with all their things and occupy our old apartment. They shouted: "We don't know any Levins, we know the Komissarchiks! They are leaving and we have the right to have this apartment!" The militia had to interfere. They checked up the documents, which were in order. The Levins stayed in the apartment for some years until 1941, when the war broke out.

OUR NEW APARTMENT

Our new apartment on the second floor in a new district of Kharkov seemed absolutely marvelous to us. There were all possible conveniences in it: gas, central heating, running water, toilet. Though there was no separate bathroom, in the kitchen, which was very small, there was a niche where a bath and a shower were installed. Both were gas-heated. To us everything seemed miraculous.

By American standards, it was a very small one-bedroom apartment. It was not very spacious for four persons. We could hardly place all our belongings in it. In the living

room there was a bed for my parents, a table and some chairs; in the bedroom, two beds for my younger brother and myself, an old wardrobe, two small tables for studying and a bookstand. In the apartment there were no closets, no fridge, no shelves -- just walls, floor and ceiling. But we felt on the seventh heaven with happiness. The overwhelming majority of Soviet people continued to live in the so-called *"kommunalki,"* i.e. communal apartments or small houses without any conveniences. We happened to be among the lucky few. Many friends and acquaintances came to see and admire our new apartment.

There was another happy event. Through our cooperative house some new pieces of furniture were sold to us on the installment basis. Now we had two new beds with some nickeled details on the top. The third bed for Karl was brought from our old apartment -- it was considered good enough. We also bought a new wardrobe, a table and four decent chairs and a sofa. The old table and two wobbly chairs were squeezed into the kitchen between the stove and the radiator of central heating. Under the kitchen window, there was a small closet where Mother kept pots and pans and some modest food supplies.

We moved to our new apartment in winter, and the first weeks in our new premises were far from being comfortable. We had central heating which works not in accordance with the weather but according to the calendar and instructions from above, i.e. from the authorities. With the calendar everything was okay, but the fact is that we moved to the new apartment in a hurry lest somebody else should occupy it. The *fabulous* comforts didn't work yet. It was terribly cold. In spite of having three beds we slept together in one so all four of us could keep warm. The bath and the shower didn't work either; we had to go to the bathhouse in the other part of the city. Still we were full of hopes and enjoyed our privacy, which we had never experienced before.

Soon the conveniences began to work, the central heating began to give some heat, not very much though. We could take a bath or a shower, we didn't have to deal with coal and fire wood and our former very unreliable stove. I must add here that all the eleven years that we lived in this apartment it was never warm enough to be comfortable except, of course, in spring and summer.

There was another miracle in our new house. As it was one of the first cooperative buildings in Kharkov, telephones were installed in all apartments if the tenants expressed such a desire. At present time it would be necessary to wait for such an event for more than ten years. Even now I remember that telephone number consisting of five digits. I was giving it to all my school friends. Unfortunately there were very few calls,

because very few people had telephones at that time.

The only tragedy for me was that parents wanted to transfer me to another school nearer to our new dwelling. Against it I demonstrated in the strongest possible way and at last the victory was on my side. I remained in the old school of which I was very fond and proud. I had to go to school by a streetcar, which made my loving parents very nervous.

When I was in the 6th grade an important event occurred in our school. A family came from Canada, and three children of the family began to study at our school. One of them, Ellen, was admitted to our class. She had arrived in the U.S.S.R. with her mother and two brothers. Their stepfather, a member of the Canadian Communist party, was at that time in prison and he urged them to go to the Soviet Union, promising to follow them as soon as he got free. But he never came to the Soviet Union. Probably he wanted to get rid of his family.

At first Ellen with her family came to Moscow. But they were not given the permit to live in Moscow, they were sent to Kharkov. Ellen's mother was also a member of the Communist Party. However, she was greatly disappointed with the situation in the Soviet Union. Never before had they lived in a communal apartment. Besides, their two rooms were damp into the bargain. Unfortunately, there was no way back. Upon coming to the U.S.S.R. they, in the fit of enthusiasm, acquired Soviet citizenship and the same limited *rights* as all of us.

Ellen and I became great friends. I helped her master Russian and mathematics. She was rather weak in science. In her turn she began to teach me English. Some rudimentary knowledge was left from my lessons with Semyon. But there was a big difference now. This time I was learning with real enthusiasm. Later on my parents, seeing my perseverance, arranged it with Ellen's mother and I began to take English lessons from her. Nobody had to make me study; I did it on my own accord.

About the further life of Ellen's family I know little. Ellen's mother, my English teacher, died before the war, in 1938. She could not stand the privations of Soviet life. Both Ellen's brothers took part in the WWII, which in the Soviet Union is called the Great Patriotic War. The younger brother, Joe, perished and the older, Alec, was badly wounded and his leg had to be amputated. Ellen's husband (she married a Marine in 1937) was in the Navy and perished during the first days of the war in the Baltic Sea.

AMERICANS ARE COMING TO US

Soon my knowledge of English had to undergo a test. I must admit I didn't prove equal to the task. In the first place, my English was still poor at that time. In the second place, it was my shyness that kept my mouth shut.

It happened in 1933. We were looking forward to a very happy event in our lives. Father's brother Uncle Shimon was coming to us with his wife Rachel from the United States of America. At present, in the period of *glasnost* it is not a rare occasion that relatives come from the United States to the Soviet Union and vice versa. But at that time it was an extraordinary event.

The situation in the Soviet Union in the thirties was terrible. The industrialization of the country was carried out at the expense of the people, and in the first place peasants. Everything was rationed, beginning with bread and foodstuffs and finishing with a pair of shoes. It was the result of compulsory collectivization carried out by Stalin. Millions of peasants were deported to Siberia and other faraway places, and the rest were not allowed to come to the cities. Millions of peasants perished during this terrible famine in the Ukraine. That was the way Stalin punished the peasants who didn't want to join collective farms.

The rationing system in the Soviet Union is not a rare occurrence. It began with the first five-year plan and continued till 1935 to be reintroduced in 1941, when the Germans invaded the country. Now it was introduced again for such basic stuffs as sugar, butter, meat, etc., and even soap.

But to return to our dear guests. We were greatly excited and were looking forward to the meeting with our American relatives. Especially busy was Mom trying to get some foodstuffs at the market. The rationing was strict at that time and the shelves in the shops were empty. As is known, the picture is not brighter now. Rationing and shortages are again in the country of my birth. And the big difference is that in the twenties people still believed in the better future, while now they hardly do.

At last the happy day came. Dad had left for Moscow to meet the long awaited dear guests. In a couple of days Uncle Shimon and Aunt Rachel, accompanied by Gissia, Dad's younger sister and Dad arrived in Kharkov. From Dzankoy, a town in the Crimea, came Father's oldest sister Soreh-Malkeh. It is very difficult for me to describe our joy and jubilation. It was a very solemn and happy time. Mother managed to

prepare many tasty dishes we had not seen for a long time. Our apartment was always full of people. Many friends and acquaintances came to us to look at the Americans. Yiddish was spoken all the time. I understood almost all. When I didn't understand a word or an expression and asked Father to translate it into Russian, he said he would do it later on. He didn't want to waste a minute of the few days he could speak with his brother. They seemed to be very fond of each other.

Aunt Soreh-Malkeh was very old and looked quite exhausted. In her young days she is said to have been extremely beautiful, blue eyed and dark haired. But at the time we met her, her eyes lost their color and almost always there were tears in them. Life was not kind to her. Mr Eletsky, her husband, was a divorcee, had to pay alimony to his former wife, and he earned very little. The Eletskys had a daughter who was being brought up at some more well-to-do relatives on Mr. Eletsky's side. Those relatives lived in the same town. My parents often sent very modest sums of money to help Soreh-Malkeh. As to Gissya, she supplied Soreh-Malkeh with different medicines. Gissya was a pharmacist and worked at the Kremlin pharmacy in Moscow. In 1942, when the Crimea was surrounded by the German troops, Soreh-Malkeh, her husband and their daughter perished together with other Jews who had lived in the Crimea.

In two days, Gissya left for Moscow; she had to work, Soreh-Malkeh returned to Dzankoy.

We spent the days with our guest seeing the sights of our city, talking and going to some restaurants. Restaurants with delicious ice cream and other good things were something unusual for Karl and me. We certainly enjoyed this new experience. In the evening we usually were at home with our dear guests and some friends and acquaintances who wanted to hear something about the far-away America. Uncle Shimon and Aunt Rachel told us many interesting things about the life in the U.S.A. We listened with great interest -- as we say in Russian,"open mouthed".

Once Uncle Shimon, finding some minutes to spare, spoke to me, as it were, personally. He began in Russian, addressing me as *"my dear niece"*. The next sentence was also in Russian: "I have something to tell you". Then I believe he found it difficult to proceed in Russian and recollecting that Dad had told him about my progress in English, he began to speak with me in English. I could understand almost all he said, but was so embarrassed that I was hardly able to pronounce a word except "yes" and "no". Mother tried to help me, pronouncing some English words I had taught her. A remark by Aunt Rachel that Mother could teach me a little English made me utterly

confused and speechless.

Uncle and Aunt stayed in one of the best Kharkov hotels, *Astoria*", in the center of the city. We were there and admired greatly the room and the furniture and the magnificent view from a very large window overlooking the central square of the city. Comparing with out apartment it seemed to us like being in the palace. Our apartment was not large; it was only 30 square meters large, i.e. approximately 360 square feet plus a very small kitchen. If one takes into consideration absence of closets and other additional places to put things into, our apartment was very small indeed. But we liked it and were very proud of it. Mom kept it very clean. It was a little disappointment to Dad that Uncle Shimon was of a different opinion and found many drawbacks in our apartment. He said that our family of four should have received a more spacious apartment. In fact, we were offered a three room apartment, i.e. two bedrooms, but after numerous discussions my parents rejected the offer. There were good reasons for such a decision. Firstly, it would be necessary to pay more money and, secondly, they would hardly be able to avoid yielding to temptation of subletting one room in case of need. Then our apartment would cease to be an isolated one. And being in need was almost a permanent situation with us. So Mother insisted on the two-room apartment, i.e. a one-bedroom apartment by American standards.

Strange as it is but at that time (it was in 1933) the foreigners coming to our country (they were very few) were not under such strict observance by security police as it was in the eighties before my departure from the U.S.S.R. We could come to them to the hotel and they could come to us without any interference.

Alas, everything comes to an end. Time passes quickly when people enjoy one another's company and have a good time. Soon we were seeing off our dear American guests. After Uncle Shimon and Aunt Rachel left, it became somehow empty and sad in our apartment. We lacked the talks and excitement, we missed our American relatives and many friends who visited us at that unforgettable time.

Uncle Shimon promised Father to do his best to get a permit for us to immigrate to the U.S.A. But at that time it was next to impossible to be allowed to leave the country. Stalin kept the borders of the U.S.S.R. locked. The possibility which we had in 1924 was lost.

Now nothing remained for us but to wait for letters *fun yam*. We did receive letters till the WWII began. Uncle Shimon had wanted to help us a little and gave Dad some

money. Besides, Aunt Rachel had given me a couple of dollars to buy silk stockings. But Mom confiscated the money given to me promising that she would try to buy stockings for me for rubles, and for dollars, she said, we could add a little to our very meager diet. What could I do but obey?

At that time in all large cities there existed special shops in which for dollars and gold one could buy everything. Those shops were called *Torgsin* (abbr. for *"commerce syndicate"*), their aim being to extort gold from the population.

In some ways the shops were similar to modern *Beryoskas*. *Torgsin* was long ago closed and done with. The prices in Torgsin were fantastically low. On the money we were given we managed with strict economy to buy some foodstuffs such as butter, cheese, sometimes even meat and others for more than half a year. Dad insisted that Mom should buy a demicoat for herself. He said it was a shame to walk with her in her old coat. I also received a gift — a pair of silk stockings! But alas, they were bought for rubles and not in *Torgsin*. I was not very happy with the buy. The stockings were of local make and far from being attractive, not like those I saw in *Torgsin*.

In two or three weeks after our Americans left, an article appeared in the central Russian paper *Isvestia*. It was about Kalinkovichi, where Uncle Shimon and Dad were from. The article dealt with Uncle Shimon and Aunt Rachel's stay in Kalinkovichi. We knew that they had been there on their way to us and left there a nice little sum of money to the local Jewish community from Milwaukeean Jews. In the article Uncle was severely criticized and called an agent of capitalists. Many years later I learned the whole story from a Kalinkovichean in Leningrad, also a Komissarchik, Father's cousin's daughter. In 1933 she still lived in Kalinkovichi and was a witness to all that took place.

A meeting was organized by the local authorities, and the Jews were made to speak about their allegedly happy life under the Soviet power. They said they lived well, had everything they needed, did not want the money from bourgeois philanthropists. The natural consequence would be to give the money back. But the Jews of Kalinkovichi were forced by the local party bosses to give the money to the Soviet state to help build socialism. And that was at the time when they were starving. The situation in *klein shtetlekh* and villages was much worse than in cities. To make matters still worse, repressions began. Many Jews were arrested as enemies of the people and agents of capitalism and sent to labor camps. Among them was Dad's cousin and namesake, Yuda Komissarchik. He was sentenced to five years imprisonment and after being released was not allowed to live in Leningrad where, after leaving Kalinkovichi, his

children lived. When I was in Leningrad in the early eighties I visited him. He lived in a village about 30 miles from Leningrad, was almost blind. From him and his daughter I learned many things about Kalinkovichi. The life there in the thirties and before was very hard indeed. In the early twenties, pogroms by numerous bands that were killing and plundering in Byelosussia, in the Ukraine and other parts of Russia were widespread. In the late twenties and thirties hunger and privations were the way of life in small towns. Under the German occupation terrible sufferings and agonizing deaths followed. Only few people could manage to escape and survive.

MY FURTHER SCHOOLING

At the time of our relatives coming form the U.S.A., I was 14 and studied at school in the sixth class *(class* corresponds to American grade). All the schools were state-owned and much experimenting was being carried out to create new forms of teaching and education that would instill atheism and hate for bourgeois ideology. Much harm was done to learning basic subjects in this way. Taking also into account that the country's economy was in ruins, the country was exhausted by Civil War and intervention, and the largest portion of the state budget went to defense and industrialization, the level of education was very poor indeed.

I was lucky to study at the school which was formerly a gymnasia, and some of the former gymnasia teachers worked at our school. In spite of all experimenting, different methods and many unnecessary activities, the teachers managed to give us more knowledge and skills than were provided in other schools.

All the schools at that time were seven-year ones, that is, not complete secondary schools. The certificate after finishing such a school was not enough for entering a college or a university. To complete the high school program and be eligible to take entrance exams at the college one had to enter some technical school *(profshkola),* some special courses or the so-called workers' faculty *(rabfak).* And it was here that a big problem arose for those who wanted to complete their high school education and to enter a college. In the country of workers and peasants there were officially no classes, but there existed different groups of people with unequal rights. The first category (aside from the party elite, i.e. *nomenclatura*) was low-skilled workers and poor peasants. The rich and often *middle* peasants were done away with during the collectivization. It was for workers and poor peasants that *rabfaks* were organized. To the second category belonged children of workers and peasants. They could also enter rabfaks and other professional schools. I belonged to the third category — children of

employees, i.e. white collar workers, and was supposed to work at some plant or factory for a couple of years to get, so to speak, my own worker's status before I had the right to continue my education. There were other categories having still more limited rights, like children of the clergy, children of the former *nepmans*. Nepmans were those who had had some businesses during the NEP, New Economic Policy proclaimed by Lenin.

Fortunately Father managed to help me enter rabfak.

MY FIRST TRIP

Before entering the college I was for the first time in my life on a very interesting journey — Leningrad and Belomor-Baltic Canal. It was an excursion for teenagers from the Ukraine who finished their secondary education. It was not without Father's help that I was included into this excursion group . Dad wanted me to visit our Leningrad relatives, Uncle Yankle's family. Yankle perished a year before in the accident at the factory he worked. I was to see Leningrad, many interesting places on the Cola Peninsula and also all the locks and structures of the newly built canal.

Everything was exciting and interesting for me especially in Leningrad, Petrozavodsk and places on the Cola Peninsula. There were about 100 teenagers and some teachers in charge of us. We had a wonderful time on the ship sailing from the Neva river in Leningrad. Then we sailed through the Gulf of Finland, two beautiful lakes, the Ladoda and the Onega, and the canals connecting them. We were moving to the north of the White Sea, which is a part of the Arctic Ocean.

Our voyage was, however, overshadowed by two tragic events. The first was an accident in which two of the participants of our excursion perished and four were severely wounded. It happened near the town Soroka on the White Sea. Our sea voyage was over and we had to go on foot to the town, which was five miles away, and the road led uphill. Only one bus was sent to meet us. We could put our rucksacks in the bus and it was announced there was room left for seven persons only if at all. So two girls took seats near the driver and another five managed to clamber up on the rucksacks, i.e. between the roof of the bus and our things. The bus was to turn in the opposite direction. Why it was not done before loading the bus, nobody knew. And here it was that the unpredictable took place. The driver probably wanted to turn the bus in the quickest possible way. The canal was not in full readiness; no fence was yet built along it. And before our eyes the bus with seven youths and the driver began

quickly to plunge into the water. In some moments only a small portion of the bus roof was seen. It turned out later that the driver seeing they were approaching water, lost his head and instead of stopping the bus he speeded it. The ship that brought us here was still in the harbor not far away. At once thick rope was brought, put around the bus, and we all began to pull. But it was no use. In some moments we saw the driver appear from the water. By a superhuman effort he managed to open the door of the bus, climbed on the roof of it, and began to shout, asking for an axe. The axe was brought and he began feverishly to cut the roof trying to save the people trapped inside the bus. Five of them survived after we administered artificial respiration. One of the five lost his leg -- it was cut off by the axe. Two girls died of heart failure before they were taken out of water.

The second tragic scene we were witnesses of took place when the security militia arrived. Here I must mention that this canal was built by *zeks*, that is, prisoners. There were some labor camps around. Our driver was immediately arrested, though without him all the seven would perish. It turned out he was a *zek* and it was his last day of the imprisonment. He had a ten years' term. The poor man would never be freed. We certainly didn't know anything about his fate, but it was not difficult to guess.

Since we were here near the canal the whole day long, drying our things which the divers were taking out of water, we had the possibility to watch the terrible conditions under which prisoners lived and worked. Though greatly saddened by the loss of our peers, we could not overlook the tragedy of the people who were exiled to these places in the majority of cases with no guilt and without trial.

Forgetting that no *glasnost* existed at that time, I sent a telegram to my parents informing them I was alright. They could not understand why I should send a telegram until I came. There were no reports about the tragedy in the newspapers.

AT THE UNIVERSITY

After finishing *rabfak* and successfully passing the entrance exams, I became a student of Kharkov University, Department of Physics and Mathematics. There were no restrictions for Jews or any other minorities at that time. I must admit that anti-Semitism was not felt, at least was not openly encouraged by the authorities. After the WWII the situation changed dramatically.

Parents were very proud of me. At school and at rabfak I was considered one of the

best in math and science. I was also fond of languages, literature and history. The first year at the university did not bring me much joy. While at school and at rabfak I enjoyed math classes immensely. But it was not more than two hours a day that we studied mathematics. At the university it was not less than 5-6 hours a day. Besides, many assignments were given as homework. That was too much for me. I came to understand that my mathematical abilities were more limited than I had thought before. Though I passed all the exams and tests more or less successfully, I began to think about changing the field of majoring. The languages were more to my liking. But both my parents and my friends tried to persuade me that it was absurd to quit the university, a prestigious establishment, and enter the foreign language department of the teachers' college. At that time, at Kharkov University, there was no foreign languages department. And so it was my fate to become a mathematician.

At the same time I began to study at the courses of foreign languages. In my third year at the university I was already tutoring privately in English and mathematics, thus helping my parents a little to make both ends meet. Mother even managed to put away something for a rainy day. For the first time in our family history Father deposited a very modest sum in the savings bank.

STALIN'S TIMES

The living standard was very low at that time. But still there were some *achievements.* In 1934 there appeared some so-called commercial stores. The prices in such stores were much higher than in the usual stores where we bought rationed stuffs, and the quality was much higher. In those commercial stores one could buy foodstuffs which were very seldom on the shelves of the ordinary stores. In 1935 the rationing was abolished and the prices became intermediate between state and commercial ones, nearer to the latter. As usual, no rise in wages was introduced to compensate the rise in prices. Still, the end of rationing was appreciated. Later on, the prices were lowered a little by Stalin's decrees. But it was a phony business, just for show and for foreign correspondents. It was very difficult to take advantage of this fall of prices because the corresponding goods were not to be found on the shelves. Among the Stalin's proponents at present, especially among the younger generation, the legends are in circulation that in Stalin's times prices were cut several times and the living standard was higher, which is a lie. The insignificant improvement in food supplies did take place, but it didn't last long. In 1939, the shameful war against Finland was launched and it immediately resulted in more food shortages and those of

other consumer goods.

What was much more terrible and frightening was the political situation in the country. In 1934 Sergei Kirov was assassinated. He was one of the outstanding leaders of the Communist Party, the party head of the Leningrad *oblast* (district), was a good orator and was rather popular both with the party members and the people throughout the country. Kirov was killed by a Nikolayev while going out of his office. What was very suspicious, Nikolayev was never arrested, even no attempts were made to this end. It was not revealed until many years later that the assassination occurred on the direct initiative of Stalin himself. At the 17th Party Congress of the CPSU in 1934, Kirov was nominated as a candidate to the post of general secretary and received more votes than Stalin. To be sure, nobody knew about this at that time except the participants of the congress. Their destiny was tragic.

The assassination of Kirov served Stalin as a pretext to launch an unprecedented campaign of terror. According to the party propaganda machine, it was the enemies of the people, the trotskites, zinovienites, bukharinites, and other *"oppositioners"* (I put this word in quotation marks because there weren't official oppositions -- one-party rule reigned) who were responsible for Kirov's assassination and who plotted to kill other party leaders. The terrible years of terror of the late thirties were masterly described by such outstanding writers as A. Solzhenitsyn, V. Grossman and many others. It is not for me to picture the horrors of that time when thousands and millions were arrested, executed without trial as the enemies of the people, sent to the faraway labor camps where they were tortured, starved and made to work under terrible conditions. I only try to give an idea of fright and helplessness we all experienced at that time of lawlessness and terror. To be arrested, it was enough that somebody even anonymously should report on you, hinting that you had said something against the authorities or complained about the difficulties.

I'll never forget my friend's husband Pavel Timoshchuk, an ethnic Belorussian, arrested in 1939. He was indicted for allegedly concealing his second name. A secret report had been sent by one of the doctors working with him at a military hospital. And though it was a lie, Pavel was arrested and beaten and tortured. That was the usual way for security men to get the confession of guilt. Meanwhile, Pavel's brother, with his family, a wife and two children, were shot in Minsk as the relatives of the enemy of people. By mere chance Pavel was not shot; he went mad because of the tortures. At that time there were no special places for political prisoners mentally ill and he was put

into a special ward in the Kharkov lunatic asylum. His wife learned about it and managed through a bribe to the doctor to receive permission to see her husband. We went together and I'll never forget what I was witness to. Pavel was unrecognizable, his face looked like a bloody mess, ribs were broken. He didn't recognize his wife, to say nothing of me. But he was *lucky* comparing with others. After being imprisoned for a year he was released and was even offered to renew his party membership. It was the rule that if a person was imprisoned, he automatically lost his party membership before the trial. Pavel refused point blank to become a party member again.

Some of our relatives were also arrested and sent to the labor camps. Among them were Mother's cousin Samuel, imprisoned for 6 years, Mother's nephew Mossyk (Moshe) was twice in the camps for more than 15 years and died of hunger; the husband of Father's niece Guissya (Yankle' daughter) Mark, was in the camp to the north of the polar circle for more than ten years with the *right* to correspond with his wife and children once a year, i.e., he was permitted to write one letter a year. The letters from the camps were thoroughly censored, no complaints were allowed. There were still harder cases: prisoners had no right to correspond at all. It often meant they were shot.

As to our distant relatives, friends and acquaintances, the cases of imprisonment were too numerous to write about. I may mention here a student of the university who was imprisoned and sent to the camps for 10 years for uttering a word about Stalin that was not considered proper.

Those years of terror and fright -- people were afraid to speak loud even in their own rooms and apartments. The brightest *spot* in those dark and frightening years was my acquaintance and later on friendship with Leo Livshits. He was a student of the physical section of our department and graduated from it in 1940, a year before I did. Alas! Our friendship was not destined to be long. The war began, he was enlisted in the infantry and sent to the front. It was only after the war was over and he returned from the hospital in 1946 that we met again and got married in 1947.

THE WAR

The situation on the eve of the war was very disturbing. The war in Europe was already unleashed. Certainly it was wishful thinking that the war would not reach our country. We were not ready for it as a state and dreaded it as citizens,

though Stalin often declared that in the case of war, we should wage it on the enemy's territory. The shameful war with Finland revealed our country's weak points very distinctly. Hospitals at that time were full of wounded soldiers and officers. Some hospitals were filled with men having no limbs. It was the result of severe battles and terrible frosts near the Mannerheim Line. The families, as a rule, did not want such horribly crippled soldiers back home. Usually hospitals of this kind were located far away from cities and towns lest the population should know something about them. But, as they say, news flies quickly, and the population was aware of those terrible victims of this needless, bloody and frightful war.

The pact between Hitler and Stalin did not give much hope; about the secret protocol we knew nothing at that time. When German troops invaded Poland and Soviet troops did the same from the East, allegedly to save at least some part of Poland from the Germans, we were simply at a loss what to think about it.

On the 22nd of June in spite of the treaty, the Hitlerite troops invaded our country and began their successful offensive.

On the very first day of the war, many cities were bombed including Kiev. In some days Kharkov also received its portion of bombs. We had to stick paper bands crosswise on the windows so that they should not be shattered out. Complete blackout was to be observed so that German pilots could not locate the targets. There were bomb shelters in many houses, but they were absolutely unreliable: They were just ordinary basements transformed into bomb shelters by some primitive means.

In case of direct hit into the house, the people in such shelters would be buried alive. So we never went there, we just were sitting at home and trembling, listening to the terrible thunder of our anti-aircraft guns.

The 22nd of June 1941 is before my eyes. I got up at 6:30 a.m. and turned on the radio. I used to listen to a German station broadcasting in English. The announcer spoke King's English and it was easy to understand him. Besides, BBC and American stations were much more difficult to *catch.* After listening for some minutes I rushed to our sitting room, which was at the same time my parents' bedroom shouting "The war has begun!" "German troops have crossed our border!" Dad was not of a very high opinion of my English and didn't believe me. He turned on our loudspeaker; there was the usual program on, not a word about the war. However, to be on the safe side Dad went to the savings bank in which we kept our very modest deposit. The bank stopped

payments to the depositors, except very insignificant sums. That was that. Only at 12 a.m. Molotov spoke over the radio, and the terrible news was told to the frustrated people.

Our financial situation was on the lowest level, the savings were kept until the better times -- nobody knew for how long. We were robbed by our Socialist state in one more way. As I mentioned before, our apartment was in a cooperative house and we had to pay for it by installments. By 1940 we had already paid 2,000 rubles. At that very time, by state decree, the cooperative houses became state-owned and we received our money back minus some deductions. The trouble was that because of inflation (this word was not used in the Soviet Union till the recent times) our money was worth 10-15 times less. So our situation on the eve of the war was really sad.

The first air raid on Kharkov is also fresh in my mind. It was in the morning. I was alone at home. Dad had gone to his office. Karl had a part-time job at some workshop. He didn't go to school; they were mostly closed, some were transformed into hospitals. Mom was out shopping, that is, standing in some line to buy some foodstuffs. I was in a state of shock, was very anxious about my relatives and didn't know what to do. I was supposed to read for the final exams at the university. But is was difficult to concentrate oneself on books and problems while everything around you looked like hell and the end of the world.

The general situation was all but terrible. In the newspapers we read articles about heroic deeds of Soviet warriors, and in the Tass communiques we read and heard over the radio about new lines of battles testifying to the fact that many cities and towns and other populated areas had been occupied by the Germans. Very reluctantly information was given about our retreats and surrenders of the cities. In some articles atrocities to population in the occupied territories were described, especially to the Jews. Although at that time we knew nothing about the so-called Final Solution of the Jewish Question, the rumors were ominous.

It was necessary to run from Kharkov and make for the East. But how to do it? Where can we go without money? That was a big question. Dad was against evacuation. He said we would perish on the way. There is a legend that Jews had been saved by the Soviet army and Soviet government. This legend is very far from the truth. In fact, no help was given to refugees besides a document by militia, a kind of identification card in which one's refugee status was certified. It is true that workers, engineers, the management of some important plants with their families, together with the

installations and equipment were evacuated in the so-called organized way. The same refers to other important institutions like research institutes, colleges, etc. They were provided with transportation means. With the majority of population, the situation was different. They had, so to speak, to help themselves. And so it was with us. Dad had worked at an office which was simply liquidated. Just in June of 1941, before the German troops invaded Russia, I had received an appointment to work at a teacher's school in Western Ukraine. I had just graduated from the university. I was lucky enough not to have left for that place in time; there was a little delay with tickets. Western Ukraine was already under the Germans.

WE LEAVE KHARKOV

I have already mentioned our financial possibilities. They were approaching zero. But the situation was critical. It was out of the question to stay in Kharkov. The Germans were already in Poltava, which is approximately sixty miles form Kharkov.

We packed two suitcases and two rucksacks and left the city on foot, leaving our apartment and all our belongings in it. Only few things we had managed to sell, and they were sold for a song. That was the way we began our very sad and very terrible *journey* out of the Hitlerite hell. Our destination and our future were quite unpredictable and gloomy.

At first we thought of going to Stalingrad, where Dad's niece Sima (Yankle's youngest daughter) lived with her husband and 3-year-old son. Stalingrad seemed to be so far away from the battles of the war, so safe. We wrote to them about our plight and they invited us to stay with them for a while. Partly on foot and partly by local trains we managed to get as far as Stalingrad. Our way was in no way easy. We were frequently bombed by the German planes. The train would stop on such occasions and we had to hide as well as we could. Usually the nearest ditches served us as very unreliable shelters. At one of the stations a possibility arose to register our two suitcases, i.e., to send them to Stalingrad. We never saw them again, remaining with our two rucksacks and a basket with some foodstuffs, mostly stale bread.

In Stalingrad we were met by my cousin and her husband, and we thought it would be our temporary shelter during the hostilities. Who could have thought the Germans would advance as far as Stalingrad?

Our relatives lived in one room in a communal apartment. They were three and our

arrival made seven. We slept on the floor and at the daytime tried to spend most of the time outside. As good luck would have it, it wasn't very cold. Though it was in late fall, the weather was more or less favorable to the refugees, or as we were called, evacuees. In every town or city we came to we were obliged to be registered. Here in Stalingrad we expected to receive the permit to stay at our relatives'! But such a permit was not granted to us. The people at the top knew the situation better than we did. We had nothing to do but continue our way further east.

We had one more place in mind. It was on the border of the Urals and Kazakhstan near Orsk. Before the revolution it was a place of exile. The famous Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko was sentenced to serve there as a private. The reason we chose this place as our second destination was that there happened to live Father's relative, Meishke Makhtey, Yankle's brother-in-law. He got to this place because of the war. He had lived in Lithuania, in Vilnus. Just on the eve of the war, when Lithuania and two other Baltic states were annexed by the Soviets, Meishke as an efficient employee was given a voucher to a sanatorium in the Crimea. And that was the place he found himself in, to be more precise, he was trapped in, when the war began. The Baltic republics were soon occupied by the Germans and he had no place to go to. He wrote to Dad asking for permission to come and stay with us in Kharkov. Dad certainly invited him, but the situation was so critical that nobody was allowed to come and stay in Kharkov.

Meishke was evacuated to Dombarshachtstroy, a town near Orsk. Now it was from him that we received the so-called invitation to come to that god-forgotten place. Being already well aware of our bureaucratic system he sent an official invitation for me to work as a teacher at school. It was surely not a very reliable document, but it stood us in good stead. And that was why after a short stay in Stalingrad we made for this faraway place; far away from our Ukraine.

Our trip there turned out to be much more difficult than that to Stalingrad. The cheapest way for us to go was on board a river ship as far as Kuybyshev (formerly Samara). It was very difficult to buy tickets. For some days we had to stand in a very long line. There were crowds of evacuees not only from the Western part of the Soviet Union but also from Poland. Constant noise, crying children, shouting mothers, no food, no shelter. It was like a hell. At last, tickets were bought and we could continue our very arduous journey They say every cloud has a silver lining. And that was the case with us. Having very few belongings, we were among the first to *storm* the ship

and secure some place to sleep at. Yes, it was really like storming the ship: the quantity of tickets sold exceeded by far the quantity of berths and seats. People were fighting for a space on the floor. Though our places were naked boards, we were considered lucky not to sleep on the floor squeezed like sardines. In case of necessity one had to jump over the bodies of the people on the floor very carefully so as not to step on somebody's extremities. Food was neither given nor sold on the ship, hot water was the only thing available. Here I might mention that no charities were and are considered proper in the Communist society.

At some docks the peasants sold watermelons, and we managed to buy some. That made our menu more *varied*. Now we had not only bread, which was stale and moldy, but also watermelons to satisfy at least partly our growing appetites.

Our voyage went on for many days. At last we arrived in Kuybyshev. Here we again became homeless as we were since the day we left Kharkov, the short *break* being our modest places on board the ship. Now we became people of the street, if I may put it so. No place to rest or sleep except the floor of the railway station, crowded by people. But even the floor could not serve as a permanent shelter. We were often driven out of the station because of cleanings and disinfection procedures. Flies, fleas and bugs were our constant companions. To make matters worse, it was frightfully cold outside. If my memory doesn't fail me, it was in November.

Now we had to continue our *journey* by rail, but it was next to impossible to buy railway tickets for Chkalov, another city on our way to Dombarshakhtstroy, which was our destination. Father tried to get tickets, alas, without success. There was a tremendous line of refugees at the booking office. Day in day out Father spent his time there, standing in the line. Some suspicious looking guys decided that Dad must have much money and every time he appeared in the line, they began to crowd around him, pushing him and trying to rob him. Dad used to return from the line with tears in his eyes. He was completely at a loss, and so were we.

MOTHER FALLS ILL

As they say, it never rains but it pours. We noticed there was something wrong with Mother. We were accustomed that she was a very patient person and never complained. But now we could hear soft moans. We persuaded her to measure the temperature and it turned out to be very high — over 104°F. In fact,

Mother was almost delirious because of the fever. Father ran to the aid station for refugees, but he returned frustrated. He could not even approach it: there was a long line of women with ailing and crying children in their arms waiting for medical help. They were shouting at Father: "Your place is at the front line! Get out of here". As usual, anti-Semitism played its part, too. Then it was my turn to try, and I accomplished what Father called later on a heroic deed. Running to the line as a crazy person, elbowing my way through the crowd of women and children, I was shouting at the top of my voice: " A person is dying! Help! Where are the stretchers?" And strange as it may seem, my terribly mad appearance and shouts produced a necessary effect. Suddenly, out of the blue, two orderlies appeared with a stretcher. I led them to the railway station, where Mother was sitting on a bench, almost losing her consciousness. She was put on the stretcher and taken to the aid station without any reaction on her part. Father accompanied her, and Karl and I remained to take care about our measly belongings and, what was more important, our small space on the floor where we could lie down and sleep a little (till the next cleaning procedure at the station).

The next morning, Dad ran to see Mother. He was warned they could keep her till the evening only: there were a lot of people in need of medical help. Mother seemed to be a little better, though she still ran a high temperature. She greatly appreciated the bath and clean bed given to her. We had not washed ourselves properly since we left Kharkov. She was given some medicines for fever. Dad ran to the booking office and as if by miracle he bought railway tickets at last.

On the same day in the evening we took a train to Chkalov. Mother had to be carried; she was too weak to walk.

In Chkalov we found ourselves once more in the building of the railway station, the situation in which was much worse than in Kuybyshev. It was still a long way from our destination. We had, however, to stay in Chkalov for awhile because Mother again felt very bad. The temperature ran high and Mother often lost consciousness. At last we managed to call the ambulance and Mother was taken to hospital. She was diagnosed as having pneumonia. Though she was almost unconscious, in the moments when she came to her senses, she was very anxious about us and about her inability to do something for us.

For some days, we lived the lives of the homeless in the direct meaning of the word. We slept in the hospital yard waiting for Mother to get well. But the doctor said she would not recover soon, if at all. We were at a loss what to do. In her lucid periods

Mother urged us not to wait for her recovery and go to the place of our destination, saying that afterwards Father would come to Chkalov and bring her to our new "home"! For a week we lived in the open air near the hospital. At last Dad decided we had to leave for our final destination, otherwise we all would fall ill and would not be able to help Mother. So we put some money under Mother's mattress, asked the nurse in charge of this ward (there were seven patients more in it) to buy some milk and something else nutritious for Mother. The meals in the hospitals were so meager that if relatives or friends did not bring anything to the patient to eat, it was hardly possible for him to keep body and soul together.

And so with heavy hearts we, now it was three of us, left Chkalov (formerly Orenburg). Our destination was Dombarshachtstroy, situated about 80 miles from Orsk.

The last part of our journey was very difficult and very sad. It was for the first time that we were without our Mother, who had always been our friend and guardian and also the most courageous member of our family. The circumstances under which we left her didn't make it easier for us to stand our separation. We were not sure we were destined to see her again. I tried to console Father and Karl, saying that Mother soon would be with us. As to myself I could hardly keep from weeping, shedding unwanted tears now and then. I remember sitting on the bench at some station, chewing a piece of stale bread and wetting it with tears. Some passerby commented: "Look at her! She is having some bread and still weeping. What does she want, I wonder?"

WE ARE IN DOMBAROVKA

At last, we arrived at Dombarshachtstroy. The long name comes from the former village Dombarovka. In the years of the Stalin five-year plans, coal deposits were discovered here. Though the coal here was of very poor quality, the so-called brown coal, some mines were built here, and that accounts for the name. (shachta means *mine* in Russian). Dombarshachtstroy became a small workers settlement. That was the place to which many *unorganized* evacuees were directed, among them Makhtey. By *unorganized,* I mean those people who were not evacuated together with their plants and equipment and not given special trains, help and subsidies for this purpose. Nobody helped them. Such unorganized evacuees were mostly from Poland and from the Soviet territories occupied by Germans. We belonged, alas, to this category. The only help we sometimes received on our way was from subsidiaries of Dad's trade union. It was a rather humiliating procedure. Dad had a paper from his

trade union (just in case), certifying that he was an active member of the trade union and asking to render some help to him and his family. The help was very meager: in some towns Father received 20 rubles; in others, a loaf of bread or nothing at all.

Dombarshachtstroy was a very unattractive small town, dirty, full of coal dust and neglected. In Russian, such a place is called *dyrah,* literally *hole,* meaning a God-forsaken place. It is situated on the border of the Urals and Kazakhstan, one of the Asian republics of the U.S.S.R. The Urals are a chain of mountains separating the European part of Russia from its Asiatic part. The climate is very severe here. As I mentioned above, it was a place of exile in pre-revolutionary times. Ironically enough the labor camps in Soviet times were located in more distant places to the east and north. Dombarshachtstroy had no greenery. The houses were dilapidated one-storied buildings and gray barracks for miners, all of them without any conveniences besides electric light. It was forbidden to use any electric appliances. Supply of foodstuffs, to put it mildly was quite inadequate. Mostly it was bread alone, for which it was necessary to queue for long hours.

Meishke met us at the railway station. He was greatly disappointed seeing our modest belongings. His baggage had not been more substantial either, but he had not come from home. He had been trapped in a resort. At any rate, he was glad to see relatives. He expressed regret that our mother had been left behind. In his youth, in Kalinkovichi he was a very close friend of Father and Uncle Shimon.

Meishke lived with a woman evacuee from Moscow, whose husband was at the front. She had a daughter 10 years old and she worked at an orphanage as a nurse. So sometimes she managed to bring home some left-overs. Meishke worked at the local education department as an accountant. That is why he was able to send me an invitation to work at school.

The most urgent problem was to find a place to live in. But it was next to impossible to do that because of the crowds of evacuees. We were promised to be put on a very long waiting list for a room in barracks, and that would only be possible when we began to work. Meishke could not help us. But, quite reluctantly, the woman he lived with agreed to give us a temporary shelter. It was in a small room, rather half-room, half-passage, where we could sleep on the floor. It was already something. We put some straw on the floor and some rags, instead of blankets we used our coats to cover ourselves with. That was better than to be homeless in those far away parts of the

country with very severe winters. And the winter was already coming. One could not do here without *valenki,* thick felt boots on which galoshes were put. Here galoshes were not always necessary because of severe frosts. Meishke went with me to the market and bought a pair of *valenki* for me.

And so our life began here in Dombarovka. There was no problem to find a job here. Every day, many people, mostly men, but women, too, were called to the induction stations and sent to the front. Father was not called up for military service because of weak eyesight, Karl was too young, fifteen.

Father got a job as an accountant at an office dealing with government purveying of grain. He certainly was busy with figures and never saw any grain. I began to work at a Kazakh teachers' school. There were separate classes for Kazakh students and for Russian students, because as a rule the Kazakhs didn't know Russian and vice versa. I taught mathematics to Russian students. The school was over five miles away from the place we lived, and during snowstorms (not an infrequent phenomenon in those parts) it was very difficult to get there. It goes without saying that there was no transport. Karl was to go to school, but he attended it very irregularly because he had no *valenkis.*

Almost every day after our work Father and I went on looking for a place to live but without any result. Too many refugees were doing the same thing. We began to lose any hope. At last, fortune smiled on us: we managed to *buy* on a temporary basis a house which had one room and a small kitchen with a Russian stove. The owners of this house (it would be more appropriate to call it a hut) were to go to the nearest town where their badly wounded son was in the hospital. It was agreed that we were to vacate the house as soon as they returned. We paid a comparatively low price for the permission to live in the house. Besides, the owners left some supply of fuel to us. It was a special kind of fuel called *kizyaki,* made into bricks of dung, straw and clay. Though it was a mining district, there were shortages with coal, and it was only miners who received some coal. The rest had to take care of themselves, and during short spring and summertime, prepare *kizyaki* for winter. To make the stove burn with such fuel and some shavings was a very difficult task indeed. At least, I could never master it. The picture left in my head is the hut full of smoke, the door wide open into the frost, tears in my eyes and all this for a long time until the stove begins to give heat and it is possible to close the door and come to cooking something.

MOTHER RETURNS FROM THE HOSPITAL

Meanwhile, Mother was still in the hospital in Chkalov, and our numerous letters remained unanswered. We wanted to believe that Mother was alive, since in the case of her death they would have to notify us. At last in two months' time, a letter came from the hospital. It was not in mother's hand, but in her name. She begged us to take her from the hospital as soon as possible, otherwise they threatened to throw her out into the street. Father immediately took a leave at his office and left for Chkalov. Karl and myself remained in Dombarshachtstroy. It was the time of great anxiety and suspense for us. The railways worked very badly, the trains were overcrowded. To buy a ticket was as difficult as to buy food. To go by train without having a ticket was dangerous. If caught in the train, one might be sent to forced labor. Somehow Father managed to leave for Chkalov and in about a week, which seemed to us a very long time, he brought Mother to Dombarshachtstroy. It was certainly a great holiday for us. We were crying with joy to see our dear mother alive. But she was too weak even to share our delight. She could not walk; Father carried her in his arms. It wasn't very difficult because Mother was like a skeleton.

In Russian, we say *kozha da kosti,* that is, skin and bones. When Mother was in our house, it became somehow lighter and warmer at once, though she was lying in bed just observing our new abode and probably thinking how to make it cleaner and less repulsive. In some days Mother began to walk a little and gradually our modest household was in her hands.

First of all, she took care of our sanitary conditions. They were sure far below very modest requirements. Soap was a luxury, rationed but very seldom available in the shops. Water was to be brought from a small river in buckets. I cannot hide the fact that we were all very much neglected and dirty. I was supposed to take care of Father and Karl. But, to be frank, I was not equal to the task. My primary duty was to prepare meals at least once a day, and this I managed to do. However, being all day long at school at my work, I could not achieve much in the way of cleanliness, to put it mildly. Lice and bedbugs were very difficult to get rid of. Some parasites were left by the owners of the house and some were brought by us from different stations where we had been lying on the floor with all kinds of people.

So Mother began to wash and scrape everything. She also tried to restore us to a decent state and to a more or less human appearance.

As I have mentioned, Father's office dealt with grain. So one fine day Father appeared at our house with a sack of flour bran. One can easily imagine our delight. The bran Father brought had nothing in common with the American raisin bran packaged and sold in the supermarkets. It was simply coarse husks of grain separated from the flour by bolting plus some inedible mixtures. Mother sieved this unexpected gift and made wonderful *ladkes*, so that once a day we had a *luxurious* dinner of millet soup and ladkes. This was our principle meal; in the morning and in the evening we had a cup of tea without sugar and a piece of bread. The tea was made of grated and dried carrots. It gave some color to our tea.

Meishke also came every day to have dinner with us. His girlfriend was too busy to make meals. Besides, she managed to eat what was left from the children in the orphanage and to bring something for her daughter.

So, step by step, we began to get used to our very hard way of life. But winter came and new difficulties emerged. The river we brought water from was frozen. In cold parts of our country in such cases, *pzorub* is made in the river, that is, an ice hole. The frosts were so severe that the layer of ice frozen in the river was very thick, and it was necessary to lie on one's stomach in order to manage to get some water out of the ice hole. More often than not I returned with the empty bucket. It was a lucky occasion if someone was near the ice hole to help. Otherwise I had to wait for Father to do the job together. The winter in those parts was long, so life was far from being easy for us. We often recollected our cozy apartment in Kharkov with its inside conveniences.

EVACUEES IN DOMBAROVKA

Local inhabitants as a rule were not hostile to evacuees, but neither were they very friendly. Severe nature, frosts, hardships, very difficult work in the mines, struggle for existence, as a rule, do not make people kinder. The inhabitants of Dombarshachtstroy, mostly miners, often former peasants deported by Stalin from the fertile fields of the Ukraine to those Godforsaken parts, were austere people. Though some of them had no idea about Jews -- they never saw them -- the bacillus of anti-Semitism was spread among them, reinforced by the Nazi propaganda. Unfortunately, we had to experience anti-Semitic escapades both during our evacuation and also in Dombarshachtstroy.

One night, it was in the middle of winter with temperatures - 40°C (-40°F), stones were thrown into our windows and pieces of glass together with stones flew into our

room. We covered ourselves with blankets and other rags, trying to find a safer corner in the room and behind the stove. When the attackers ran away we used all the rags we had to caulk the windows. It became terribly cold in our house. We put on all the warm things we had. Feeling absolutely helpless, no neighbors near, no telephone, we spent the remaining sleepless night terribly downcast, and we could not expect help from anywhere. In the morning Father went to the militia station and two militiamen came to us, but they could do very little. Fortunately, the attack was not repeated, but we lived under constant fear in this hostile neighborhood.

They say that it never rains, but it pours. And it was exactly the case with us. The long awaited spring came and though the river we took water from was very small, flooding was expected. It was necessary to take into account not only our river, but also very large quantity of snow and ice accumulated through the winter. We had to undergo an interior evacuation to the higher part of our settlement, which by American standards might be called a micro-downtown. This central part of Dombarshachtstroy consisted of some one-story buildings housing local *government* offices and barracks for workers, miners and evacuees. We were on the waiting list to receive a room in the barracks. But there were no vacant rooms at the time of impending disaster. According to the decision of the local authorities, the people of the areas expected to be flooded were to be moved to the rooms already occupied by families. This process is called *uplotneniye*, and we were acquainted with it in the twenties.

The room we were forcibly moved into was already occupied by a family of four. They were also refugees from a Ukrainian town in the Donetsk Basin. They were Ukrainians, and I must admit they comprehended our situation and did not treat us badly. They knew and hoped we were temporary intruders. There was an extra bed for all of us. It served as a bed and as a table when we had something to eat. Especially uncomfortable our neighbors felt when they had to have meals in our presence. They tried not to do it while we were in the room. The fact is that their meals were much more substantial than ours. Their grown-up children often disappeared and, as we learned afterwards, they managed to penetrate into the territory occupied by Germans into the town they had lived and bring some foodstuffs. It was certainly a very risky business, but they were not Jews and their friends and relatives that had remained in the occupied territory helped them. As far as we were concerned, we could not do it, and our daily rations consisted of millet soup and a piece of bread once a day. The millet soup and some porridge I brought from the canteen. I was the only member of our family eligible as a teacher to a permit to the canteen. At the canteen I ate my

dinner with the eyes only and brought it *home* to share it with my mother, Father and Karl. It goes without saying that the meal was very meager and far from being nutritious. It didn't eliminate the feeling of hunger, which we felt all day long. At the market it was millet only that was sold by the native Kazakhs. Even if we had some millet, we couldn't cook it because we had no fuel. As a rule, we tried not to be at *home* as long as we could help it. Our *landlord* often told Father after we moved to a barrack that he wondered how we could keep body and soul together on such a diet. I also wondered how I could teach mathematics at school being constantly hungry, always thinking about something to eat.

But we were well aware that the situation could be worse. By a miracle we received a letter from a relative from the then besieged Leningrad. She wrote that they were literally dying of hunger. We decided to fast for three days, to dry some bread we saved and send it to them. But it turned out to be impossible: no parcels were admitted at the post office. And even if they were admitted, how could they reach Leningrad surrounded and besieged by the Germans?

Everything comes to him who waits. At last, our turn came and we received a room in a barrack. We said good-bye to our Ukrainian friends. They really behaved quite decently, but surely they sighed with relief when we moved. At the parting the head of the family presented Father with a penknife and a small piece of bacon which was devoured by us on the same day. We wished one another good luck and the end of the war in the nearest future.

Our so-called new apartment was a single dark room with a small window overlooking the dirty yard, without any conveniences except an electric lamp hanging from the ceiling. The floor was of rough unpainted boards with many chinks. There were chinks and cracks in the walls, too. No central heating, so we had to use a kerosene stove to get a little warm. We also prepared our modest meals on this stove. In winter it was terribly cold; it was blowing from all the chinks. We often slept fully dressed plus all the things we had serving as blankets. But the worst scourge of all was the so-called unregistered tenants the bedbugs. Though Mother did her best to get rid of them and was constantly cleaning and scrubbing, the whole barrack was infested and full of them. There were no powder and detergents to fight those parasites. Getting a cake a soap, which was rationed as well as bread and few other foodstuffs, was a very rare occasion. Before going to school I had to shake and brush thoroughly my coat, which served me as the blanket at night, lest I should bring one of the bugs with me to school.

My work as a teacher went on peacefully. But it took me much strength to get to school. It was far away from the place we lived and there were no houses on the way to school, just an open field. The way was along the line of telegraph poles. In winter, in *bourans* (severe snowstorms), the poles became invisible until you came close to them, and it was very easy to lose one's way.

I remember very well an occasion when because of the snowstorm and severe frost, to say nothing of my empty stomach, I was at a loss which way to go. There was nobody to ask the way and I felt absolutely helpless. All of a sudden I noticed an approaching figure. It turned out to be a local miner. He looked at me, called me a fool and asked if I want to lose my nose. I could not understand what he meant, because when some parts of the body get well frozen, you don't feel it. He told me in a very rude way that my face was white and frozen and that it was necessary to do something about it. Then he went on his way. I felt miserable and lost. But in a moment I saw the man return. He came to me, caught my hand and dragged me to the nearest shed I had not noticed before. He began to rub my face with snow. Soon I began to feel my nose and cheeks again. They were burning. It was quite painful. Calling me again a fool, he left me. I could hardly thank my savior for his kind deed. After this accident I always carried a piece of looking glass in my pocket, watching my face from time to time and, if necessary, using the method I had been taught on that memorable day in the Kazakhstan steppe.

The work in this teacher's school was unpleasant not only because of the long distance from our barrack, but in many other ways. Besides teaching, I had to work in the library for about two hours a day, giving the students books and textbooks. The library was located in a shed in the school yard. Because of frequent snowfalls and snowstorms, it was necessary to clean away the snow almost every day to be able to get to the *library*. The books, because of the chinks, were also covered with snow, so they also demanded cleaning. While giving the books to the students and writing down what they took, I had to wear my mittens and that was far from being convenient. The majority of teachers were Kazakhs and Tatars; some of them spoke very poor Russian which was difficult to understand. There were two parallel classes: one for Russian students and another for Kazakhs. The director of the school was a Kazakh, Kogobayev by name. He was a very rude guy, especially rude he was to Russian teachers, who were mostly refugees of Jewish background, like myself. At school they gave *lunch* to the students consisting always of farina porridge cooked with water and without any fat. The teachers could also have this lunch if they were at school at that time. Bread

was not served; it was rationed and sold in the shop near our barrack, and the line for it was very long. To be sure, I always had this tasteless farina porridge.

Once, after some months, a camel was slaughtered in the neighboring Kolkhoz and part of the meat was given to our school as a kind of help to children studying here. The Kazakhs prepare a special national dish of camel's meat called *bishbarmak* adding some millet. The smell was very attractive, but I cannot tell anything about the taste: it was given to Kazakh teachers only. However hard my Russian colleagues and myself tried to persuade our chief that we were also human beings going hungry and doing the same kind of work, he distributed the meat among his Kazakhs only. As to the students, it was only once that they were treated to small portions of *bishbarmak.*

I may mention here that it is characteristic of the Soviet system that every chief, however insignificant the office he is in charge of might be, feels like a small tsar in all aspects minus ideology, which is sacred. Very little has changed even now.

It was no wonder I was glad when the local education authorities transferred me to another place of work, a primary school. Unfortunately, it was not teaching that I was supposed to do there, but working as administrator, which was absolutely foreign to me. The headmaster of the school was enlisted and sent to the army, and I was appointed in his place. The only consolation for me was that the management of RONO (local education authorities) promised that the job would be temporary, that I would be transferred to the secondary school (equivalent to high school) in the capacity of teacher as soon as they found somebody else to run the primary school.

I had never worked as an administrator before and anticipated not in vain that I would be a poor one and would have a lot of troubles.

It turned out exactly the way I thought. The first problem I had to deal with was fuel for school, that is, coal and firewood. My predecessor, before going to the front, had managed, by hook or by crook, to receive all the fuel planned and intended for our school for the current school year. He distributed it between his family and his relatives. Alas, he was out of reach and I had to run from one office to another and with tears in my eyes tried to prove to them that it was not my fault, that we needed fuel badly, that the children might fall ill because of cold. That was not the only problem confronting me. There were others -- both administrative and pedagogical tasks which were very difficult for me to manage. I was not accustomed to order people about. Asking my subordinates for help was no use; they always found excuses not to help me. I had to

do everything myself. Even my attempts to improve teaching process were met in a very unfriendly way. Some teachers spoke such abominable and illiterate Russian that I considered it my duty to try very gently to give them some advice. It was to no purpose. They were sure they spoke it in the right way.

My work as the headmaster of the school lasted for about three months, but to me it seemed much longer. I felt responsibility for children who were studying in terrible conditions. They had to study in the cold classrooms with their coats or padded jackets on. There were no lavatories inside the school building, and from time to time it was necessary to cover up those stinking pits which served as lavatories and dig out new ones.

At last they found a substitute for my post and I was transferred to a secondary school, as we call it, to work as a teacher. Now my principle duties were to teach mathematics. Later on, in spite of my protests, they added physics. I tried hard to explain to them that I had been majoring in mathematics and not physics. But it was in vain: my diploma ran that I was a graduate of the department of physics and mathematics, and that was all. They did not want to take the trouble to look through the list of subjects I had studied at the university. It was a very difficult school year for me. The head of studies of the school was the wife of the local *voyenkom*, the military commissar of the Dombargvsky province. At the time of war it meant the boss of the whole town and the province and even the school principal was afraid of the *voyenkom* wife. At first, Natalya Vassilyevna, it was the name of the head of studies, being a math teacher herself, wanted to get rid of me, since I was the only teacher at the school with a university diploma. It would be easy for her to accomplish it through her husband, in whose hands were the fates of all adult population of the military service age (from 18 to 60). To her dismay, she found out I wanted to join the army and even handed in an application. It was done secretly, my parents would never approve it. Then her policy to me changed dramatically and she proclaimed me to be almost irreplaceable. My wish to join the army was not to be accounted for by my bravery. Far from it: I am more on the cowardly side. It was the constant hunger and hopeless life that made me forget all the rest and wish some change. There is a Ukrainian proverb, *"Let it be worse, but something else."* Another Russian proverb runs: *"Hunger is not a kind aunt"*.

The work at school was far from being pleasant. It was especially so when I was made to teach physics besides mathematics. The respect the students had for me as a math teacher began to diminish noticeably when I began to teach them physics. Endless pieces of advice and naggings on the part of my chief did not make my life happier.

When she could not find faults with my math lessons, she said my physics lessons were not quite comprehensible to the students. She herself had a very vague idea about physics. She also used to say that a teacher should have a better and tidier winter coat. My winter coat was a sore point with me. It was really not nice looking, serving at night as a blanket. In spite of my thorough brushing it in the morning it did not look attractive at all.

During the vacation, I volunteered to work on a collective farm expecting to get some foodstuffs for it. Besides, twice a day, meals for the farm hands were served. I went to the collective farm together with my brother. As ill luck would have it, at that time a land surveyor came from the oblast center and he needed workers for digging wells and trenches.The work was exceedingly hard and exhausting, especially for the people who had already been exhausted by hunger. But the chairman of the kolkhoz didn't want to listen to our arguments and to take into account that we came to work in the field. He didn't want to send the kolkhozniks to work with the land suveryor. The kolkhozniks were not numerous, the majority of males being in the army.

Our *team* attached to the land surveyor consisted of three persons: my brother Karl, a former prisoner from Tula, Zon by name, and myself. Zon, being released from prison, was not allowed to live in cities, so he lived in this kolkhoz without enjoying even those limited rights the collective farmers were supposed to enjoy. He had no permanent shelter and slept in some shed. He was sent to some kind of work the kolkhozniks refused to perform. And so we found ourselves in a *nice* company, having to fulfill this very difficult job of earth moving. The work was really beyond our physical abilities. Karl and Zon were digging the ground and my task was to throw away the earth which was dug out. Even to raise a spade with some earth on it made me almost fall down to the ground. Hard as I tried to behave with dignity, I often could not hide my tears. Especially hateful for me was watching our land surveyor sleeping in the shade nearby while we had to work hard and sweat in the sun. During short breaks, Zon told us a lot of stories about the life of prisoners. Those stories made our hair stand on end. What he related about the evacuation of prisoners from Tula (a town not far from Moscow) was simply unbelievable. Unfortunately it was true. The prisoners (not political ones) were put into cattle trucks, locked for some days without food and without the possibility to go out in case of necessity during the *travel*. When the train with the prisoners arrived at its destination and the cars were opened, more than half of the *passengers* were dead. Zon said it was a miracle he remained alive. He was certainly not a friend of the Soviet power and was an anti-Semite into the bargain. In his opinion, the war began because of the Jews. The Russians didn't need the war and were simply its victims.

Our work went on. Karl was also quite exhausted. Although we came to work on a volunteer basis, we could not quit the work: it would be considered desertion during the wartime and would be punished accordingly. So we had to continue our work for more that a month. We expected to be given some foodstuffs for our work, but we didn't receive anything and nobody expressed any words of gratitude: for nothing we toiled. There was no means of transportation and we could hardly reach home using the passing trucks.

We returned home tired and exhausted with *empty hands* with nothing to gladden our parents with. To make things worse, we were more hungry than before going to the Kolkhoz, which was probably the result of being in the fresh air, the only thing we could enjoy.

Now we had to face another problem. Karl finished school and it was necessary to think about his further career and education. In Dombarovka there was nothing for him to do but to wait to be taken to the army. He was 16 at that time; the service age was 18. The only possible job was in the mines. So we decided that he should send an application and documents to the Urals Polytechnical Institute (institute in Russian means both research institute and college) in Sverdlovsk. Mother would not think of letting him go alone, so it was settled that I would go with him. But it was not so easy. The system that existed at that time was very close to serfdom: nobody could leave the place of work without a special permit from authorities. With the peasant population, such a system existed till the very recent times. They had no passports and could not leave either their villages or the kolkhoz they were member of.

With great difficulties I managed to get the permission to quit my job at school. Karl received an invitation from the institute, he was admitted to as a student. At the time of war there were no entrance exams. So we left for Sverdlovsk. The parting with our parents was very sad. They could not supply us either with money or with some food for the way. The only thing Mother could do was to give her demicoat, which was altered, padded and was more attractive than my faded old coat. Mother's present stood me in good stead during very severe Urals winters.

We were also very sorry to leave our parents in this terrible barrack. We were not sure that some other tenants would not be put into their room. And so it happened: another couple was added to their dismal dwelling to make their life still worse, if not unbearable.

IN SVERDLOVSK

Our first impressions of Sverdlovsk were quite positive. After such a God-forsaken place as Dombarovka, Sverdlovsk seemed like a European city. Of course, we have never been in Europe to compare. Sverdlovsk, formerly Ekaterinburg, is a large city in the central Ural mountains in the Western Asiatic part of the Soviet Union. It was the place where the last Russian tsar and his family were executed. During the war, Sverdlovsk, being one of the largest industrial centers, played a very important part in the defense of the country. Many large plants and institutions were evacuated to Sverdlovsk, among them were Moscow University, Air Force Academy and many others.

Karl was given a place in the institute hostel. Attached to the institute where he was admitted there was a polytechnical school called Urals Polytechnicum. I became a math teacher there and was given a place in the same hostel, but on a different floor. To find a job at that time was not difficult. Every day, people were called up to the military service and sent to the front lines. The wages were very low; the money I received was hardly enough to buy foods in the shop. Everything was strictly rationed, the principle food being bread. We received a pound of bread a day each, and it was necessary to be very disciplined not to finish with it by the middle of the day in the canteen. Once a day we had stamps to go to the Institute canteen, we had to bring our bread. Still the situation was a little better here than in Dombarovka.

I remember well our first day in Sverdlovsk and our going to the canteen. We were really stunned: the dinner we were served seemed to us luxurious. It consisted of three courses: soup, some porridge with a small piece of meat and a cup of cocoa. When we began eating our enthusiasm diminished significantly: everything was unsalted. It turned out there had been no salt in the city for some days. Still we didn't leave anything on the plates and as in the case of poor Oliver Twist, the plates wanted no washing up. Especially we appreciated the meat, unsalted though: we had not seen meat for many months. I must mention here that I am deeply convinced that but for the American help in foodstuffs we would never be able to win the war. It was especially clear to me in Sverdlovsk which, being an important center of industry and defense, was supplied with and almost lived on American foods. In Dombarovka and other such places the situation was entirely different. Even in Sverdlovsk the feeling of hunger never left us. But here there was work for me to do, there were classes for Karl to attend and homework to do and we lived in clean rooms in a large house, not in barracks.

When I managed to get some potatoes and cook them in the communal kitchen (there was only one kitchen on each floor with many rooms and long corridors), I had to wrap them well so they might not cool, and go to Karl's to share this meal with him. But soon this inconvenience was overcome quite miraculously. Because of house shortage, it was announced by the institute authorities that in professors' houses the bathrooms would be given to students to live in. A very *bright* idea. Those bathrooms in professor's apartments fortunately were separated from toilets. The baths were removed from bathrooms, and in this way some additional living space appeared. Professors' houses were just apartment houses with communal apartments, that is, one apartment was shared by two or more families. This initiative of giving bathrooms to homeless students was ascribed to professors themselves, which was certainly not true.

Having nothing better to think of, Karl and I decided to seize the opportunity to have some small room of our own. We were among the first to submit an application for a bathroom to live in. We were praised and there even appeared an article in the local institute paper about us: we vacated two places in the hostel.

And so our life began in a very small roomlet. One can easily imagine how *pleased* were the other tenants of this communal apartment. Now they had to wash themselves in the dirty kitchen over a small sink and to go to the public bath many blocks away. In the apartment there lived three families, every family occupying one room. All in all, there were seven persons not counting us. Later on, two more subtenants appeared, a young couple who had taken part in the war in Spain. They were students of the Military Academy and occupied part of the room separated by a screen. Their landlady lived in the other part of the room. She was a widow; her husband had perished in the war. To be sure, we were the most unwelcome tenants in the apartment, but our neighbors tried to be tolerant, except for an elderly lady who lived with her three grandchildren and who openly and quite rudely expressed her displeasure. She often said she hoped we would die of hunger pretty soon. Fortunately, her hopes didn't come true.

Our furniture consisted of two narrow iron beds melted together one above the other. We could hardly squeeze them into our room, which had the area of no more than 3 square meters (28 sq. feet). Besides, we had a very small table and a stool. When we were having our meal, I had to sit on the lower bed with my head bowed because of the upper bed and Karl was sitting on the stool. It was terribly cold in our roomlet and we were eating, rather gulping, our hot soup with our padded jackets on, trying to keep warm. Later on, we found out that the elderly lady, our unfriendly neighbor, turned off

the central heating pipe leading to the bathroom. In this way she hoped to raise the temperature in her room. The central heating in the house worked very poorly, but to be sure our being turned off from the heating system didn't help her. When other tenants of our apartment got to know about her action against us, they expressed strong protest and our rights to some portion of the heat were restored. It didn't become much warmer in our room, though. We brought our dinner home from the canteen, because it seemed to us that in this way they gave us more soup. The soup was always the same -- made of sour cabbage with no traces of meat or fat. We usually began with the liquid part, leaving the cabbage for the second course. We were also given a small portion of millet porridge and once in a blue moon a very small piece of meat of very doubtful quality.

We had ration stamps which entitled us to buy bread and sugar, the latter being very seldom on the shelves of the shop. We didn't consume sugar but exchanged it for bread. It was possible to do it through waitresses who together with the kitchen staff managed to *save* bread and other foodstuffs, making the portions given to students and instructors as small as possible.

Our life in the new *apartment* was interrupted in the middle of the second semester. Both the students and the instructors were sent to work on the collective farms. There was always shortage of hands, but at the war time it was especially so. I may add that this practice of sending white-collar workers, students and instructors to the collective farms takes place now, too. Only workers are often spared, because they have to fulfill plans of their plants and factories, working very often on Saturdays and even Sundays.

The work on the farm was very hard indeed. Two meals a day were a little bit more substantial than those in town, but still they were not enough to compensate for the hard work we had to do every day, often without any days off. To receive stamps for the meals in the kolkhoz canteen it was necessary to fulfill the day's norm. More than once I couldn't fulfill the day's quota, and would have gone hungry without a morsel in my stomach if Karl had not shared with me his very modest meal.

At last, the harvest time was over and we returned to our work and studies. Neither work nor studying was easy for us. The constant undernourishment told. The place of my work was quite near the house we lived and normally it would take me not more than five minutes to get there, but under the circumstances I had to leave home half an hour before the classes began because I could hardly drag myself along.

Two episodes come to my mind when I recollect those hard times. Together with us came a young guy from Dombarovka. He also entered the college and studied together with Karl. He could not stand the hunger and decided to return home. He was one of the local residents; in Dombarovka he didn't go hungry, his parents had stored something for a rainy day. An idea flashed across our minds that we could have some additional portion of bread for ourselves in case of Vassya's departure (Vassya was the guy's name). It was the beginning of the month. The bread stamps were given once a month at the beginning of the month. We could make a bargain with Vassya. He needed some bread for his journey home and the bread was sold only for the current day. We could supply him with some bread and he leaves the remaining stamps for us. For this purpose we had to save some bread by fasting for some days. And we did it, anticipating the *luxurious* life we would have during the remaining part of the month with an extra portion of bread. One can easily imagine our disappointment or rather frustration when the guy returned twice, being unable to book a ticket for the train. We couldn't help sharing some bread with him. It was like a nightmare when we saw him return. Afterwards, we often felt fright that he would return again but he never did.

The second occasion was happier. We received a parcel from our parents. It was really a miracle. The parcel contained white crackers. It turned out that Father managed to get some flour we had earned working on the farm. The rest was done by Mother. She baked some loaves of bread, then cut the loaves into nice small pieces and dried them in the oven. The problem was how to deliver this treasure to us. At the post office parcels to ordinary Soviet citizens were not permitted, only soldiers and officers were entitled to this *privilege*. But I found among the officers of the military academy my former fellow-student who agreed to receive the parcel for us. For some days we felt like very rich people, but to prolong the pleasure of enjoying the crackers was above our power.

It goes without saying, we closely followed the movements of our troops. The terrible months of retreat were over and the offensive began. The German troops were surrounded at Stalingrad. We hoped the war would be soon over and we would be able to return home.

RETURN OF OUR PARENTS

I well remember the 7th of November of 1943. On that day Kiev was recaptured by our troops. It was a great victory and we were overjoyed. The day coincided with the Soviet holiday — anniversary of the October Revolution. By the

prerevolutionary calendar the revolution of 1917 took place in October. Kharkov was taken by the Soviet troops twice. First, after the Stalingrad battle. But soon it was recaptured by the Germans as a retaliation for the defeat in Stalingrad, with great losses for our army. More than 200,000 men and officers were taken prisoners. It was not customary to mention this defeat in our war history. General Grigovnko wrote about it in detail.

On the same day when Kiev was freed we received a telegram from our parents. They were coming to us. It was quite unexpected and a pleasant surprise. For a long time we had not received any letters and were very anxious about them. It is true that the post office worked very badly; still there were grounds for our anxieties. The situation in Dombarovka became much worse after we left. Our parents had to live in the barrack with one family more in their room. There were almost no foodstuffs. Even to buy bread, it was necessary to queue for long hours. To be sure, our parents were dreaming of returning home. So when part of the Ukraine including Kharkov was liberated, Father decided to submit an application to be allowed to return to our home. He received the permission and was given two places in the echelon bound for the Ukraine. (echelon is a special train with freight cars for people). Our parents hoped to get back to our apartment if it had not been demolished by bombs. But as they say: man proposes and the heavens dispose. On their way to the East the route of the echelon was changed and the direction was now to the Saratov province to work on the collective farms. The change of the route was connected with the counterattacks of German troops and the unsuccessful attempt to recapture Kharkov by Soviet troops.

For more than two months my parents were *traveling* in the cattle wagon. Twice Father fell ill with pneumonia. It was a miracle that he remained alive. There was no medical service. In the whole train there was only on *feldsher* (medical attendant) with very few medicines available. It was thanks to Mother's constant care that Father survived under such terrible conditions.

On the next day after the telegram was brought, our dear parents arrived with very few belongings and very thin and exhausted. The quantity of tenants in our *one-bathroom* apartment doubled. Father and Karl had to sleep on the *second* floor, above Mother and me. We wondered if our narrow iron beds welded together could stand such a load. They did in spite of ominous creaks. The tenants of our communal apartment were certainly not very happy with the new tenants. But it turned to be a blessing in disguise for them too. In a short time all our family vacated the bathroom and it was returned to the tenants. The bathtub again occupied its lawful place.

It was all connected with Father's coming. He got a job as an accountant in the so-called ORS, a department of food supplies for workers, which was attached to the Urals Polytechnical College. And what was very important, we got a room in the college hostel.

To make things better still, Father received a permit to use the college canteen and also an additional permit to take one portion of the dinner home. While being in the canteen Father was often treated to additional helpings or sandwiches. He never ate them there, but brought those *treasures* home for us. When he returned from his office in the evening, our eyes were fixed on his bag. We knew something was in store for us. Father was a very kind man and was always delighted to see Karl and me devour everything he had brought. The portion of dinner Mother brought from the canteen was also liberal until once a commission that was checking up the canteen found out that Mother had received more than was her due. On that unpleasant day and for some days afterwards we didn't receive anything at all. But later on, the problem was solved and we continued to receive one portion of dinner. Thus the food situation was partly solved by Father. To be sure, it was far from being good. The rationed bread which we received was strictly divided into four portions. I was in charge of this procedure until I left for Kharkov in 1944. Mother and myself always tried to give a little bit more bread to our men. It was men who mostly suffered from hunger. But both Father and Karl strongly protested against such unjust distribution of bread. The bread was of very poor quality and crumbled off easily, but not a crumb was lost. Those crumbs were usually our dessert: every one of us cleaned his or her portion of the table very thoroughly, so that nothing was left. This partial improvement in our diet told. Karl did not swell of hunger any more. My cheeks, which before Father's coming were quite black of constant undernourishment, became rosy again.

Our second delight was our room. It was rather large with four iron beds, a table and four chairs. We enjoyed our room immensely. After our living in the small bathroom, it seemed like a large hall in a palace. There was a communal kitchen in the passage with a sink and running water and a lavatory with a flushing toilet. It seemed to us the height of possible comforts. It is true that in the kitchen there was neither gas nor electric stove. There was a usual stove for which we needed coal and wood. But one can't have all at once. In a word, we were just ecstatic about our new room. Mother kept everything clean and we tried to help her in every way. Once a week we went to the bathhouse. We washed our linen in the kitchen, though, because of the shortage of soap (there were no other detergents at that time), our washing didn't look very white

and attractive. But at least we knew it was boiled, and with Mother's help we got rid of bugs and lice.

WE GO TO WORK ON A COLLECTIVE FARM AGAIN

Our life in the new room was interrupted for a time. Once more Karl and I were sent to work on the collective farm. The collective farmers themselves worked very little. It was mostly women. They received so little for their work that they had no stimulus. They were treated like slaves and, as is well known, slaves' labor is not productive. While we, who came from the city, at least received two meals a day, the money they received wasn't enough to buy half a meal a day.

It was certainly better here than in Dombarovka, but still hard enough. Those meals were poor and insufficient for working all day long. Fortunately, our group was given an assignment to guard the vegetable stores of the collective farm. Every night one of our group was to be a night watchman. The rest of the group was to work in the field. To have a *job* of a nightwatch was not a bad thing. In the daytime, a *watchman* could rest and sleep, because he or she worked at night. It was a kind of compensatory one-day leave. What was very important, we had access to collective farm's raw vegetables, and every one of us who was *guarding* the vegetable farms was to bring some potatoes, carrots and a head or two of cabbage. The collective farmers knew about our *deeds*, but they didn't care much; those vegetables were not theirs. Here one may recollect a proverb: Commonly possessed, commonly neglected. I suppose that is the problem of the centralized economy in the Soviet Union. Soon our group was sent to other farming works and we had to say good-bye to the vegetable barns and stores.

That stay on the collective farm proved to be very long and very difficult for me. After one month's work, I felt totally exhausted. Because of the dirt all around and improper food, some painful and terrible looking abscesses appeared on my body; especially one on my right arm. I ask for a leave for some days (there was no health service on the farm), but was not allowed to leave in spite of my complaints and displaying the abscess on my arm. Then I did what in the army was punished very severely and called *samostrel*, e.g. self-inflicted wound: I put some dirt on my abscess to make it look more terrible than ever. On the following day after such a *treatment* my arm began to take on a touch of black and looked terrible indeed. After *demonstrating* my *wound* I was at last permitted to go to town for some days. There was a group of people with some ailments who were also given short leaves, and we decided to start on our *trip* on the following day. At night on the eve of our departure Karl and I went to

the farm potato field and dug up some kilograms of potatoes. I couldn't think of coming to parents empty handed, knowing quite well that their nutrition left much to be desired, to put to mildly. It was especially poor in vegetables, to say nothing of other foodstuffs. After filling my rucksack with about 15 kg (more than 35 pounds) of potatoes and looking around not to be caught, we left the field. I was ready for the trip to town.

The farm we worked on was about 25 km (approx. 16 miles) from Sverdlovsk, and this distance was to be covered on foot. With heavy rucksack on my back and very inconvenient padded jacket and footwear, the so-called *laptis* (last shoes), I didn't feel in good form. It was already October and it was rather cold and rainy. We went through the forest, sometimes quite near railway stations. But we were not allowed to enter any station building even during the rain, being dirty and suspicious looking. To make our *journey* more awful, twice wolves tried to attack us. They were probably more hungry than we were.

How happy I was at last to see my parents and to be home. My sack of potatoes was certainly brought at the proper time and was much appreciated, but I was scolded bitterly for neglecting and aggravating my abscesses for a long time. And what could I do? With mother's loving care, I was soon clean and my abscesses gone. Alas, how sweet and warm it was at home, but I had to return to the farm again for one month more. This month seemed to be very long.

IN SVERDLOVK AGAIN

Everything comes to an end and we were again in Sverdlovsk. I resumed my work as math teacher at the technical school; Karl, his classes at the college. With loving and caring parents living with us, we felt almost happy in spite of poor nutrition and numerous hardships.

Now a problem arose about Karl. In spite of our victories at the fronts hundreds of guys were called up for military service every day and sent to the front. The boys of 1925 of birth were being called up -- students, instructors, professors, no deferment for anybody. Karl was born in 1926 and could receive call-up papers any day. But, as they say in Russian, *on our street may also be festivities.* (It corresponds to the English: Every dog has its day). A decree of the Supreme Soviet was published to the effect that professors, instructors and students of some technical colleges got deferment. It was already the beginning of 1944 and the situation at the fronts was favorable for the

Soviet Army, which was advancing at all the fronts. We all were full of hopes that the war would be soon over and we could return home.

Kharkov was already liberated and we thought our dreams would come true. It was not so easy to return to our parts. The laws at that time were very strict: One couldn't leave his job on his own accord; a special permission of the authorities was necessary. Father wanted to be the first to go. He hoped to get back our apartment, if it were not demolished by bombs and missiles. Unfortunately, he was not allowed to give up his work. With me it turned out to be a little easier. The school year being over, and with some drop-out of students due to different reasons, I managed to receive a sack and began to prepare for a very difficult trip back home. It was not enough to be free from work, it was also necessary to get some document certifying that you were sent to work in some liberated district of the Ukraine. After numerous troubles with the ubiquitous red tape, I got a certificate of being sent to the Ukraine to work at schools.

I TRY TO IMPROVE MY ENGLISH

In Russian, there is a proverb which in a word-for-word translation would read: There is no sad happening without some good one following (*nyet khuda byez dobra*). It reminds me of the English proverb with a more delicate wording: *Every cloud has a silver lining*, and so it was with me. The life in Sverdlovsk was very difficult indeed, very often unbearable. But I was happy to find some possibilities to improve my English. That was a good means to distract myself for a few hours a week from the hardships of life. First, I discovered that the local library had many English books and I began to take them home. The first book I took from the library was a classic, *Jane Eyre*, and I enjoyed it very much. It was followed by many others.

There were two English study groups for teachers and post-graduates at the Urals Polytechnical College, which I joined. It was not easy for me to do so, because I wasn't a member of the college staff. The chairwoman of the foreign languages department was a former maid of honor of the last tsarina, a very majestic and serious lady. She had been in exile for many years, and after being released was permitted to work at the college. As all ladies of nobility, she knew French perfectly well, but since French was not taught at colleges at that time, she took up German and even published a German manual for students of science and technology. I managed to persuade her that I worked at the affiliated technical school and was interested in improving my English and eventually she gave me a permit to attend those study groups.

The instructor of the first group was an elderly American lady, Oakland by name. She had come to the Soviet Union for a temporary stay with her son, an expert in electrical engineering. She knew three or four Russian words only, among them a very popular one at that time, *birka*, meaning an additional coupon for some foodstuff. Without such a *birka*, or a ration card, one could not buy anything. I often helped her to *otovarivat* those *birkas*, that is, to buy goods by means of those coupons, which also gave me the opportunity to practice my English and to forget about being hungry. Mrs. Oakland's method of teaching was, as she put it, active speech. It meant we had to describe the action she named. For example, she would say "Here is a cow, please milk it". And we had to describe this process, which was not easy either in English or in Russian. At any rate, the necessity to describe different processes stimulated the speaking skills.

The second teacher, Mrs. Salkind, was an evacuee from Moscow. She had been teaching English at the Moscow International Relations Institute, a very prestigious institution. She was a graduate of The University of Chicago and her English was perfect. Her method was based on reading some novel and re-telling and discussing it. She never uttered a word in Russian and forbade us to do so. We were not allowed to translate into Russian, but had to explain the meaning in English. In her opinion, using Russian would interfere and spoil our pronunciation. Both methods gave me much good and improved my English considerably.

ANTI-SEMITISM

Before leaving for the Ukraine, I had some personal experience with the growing anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union. I must mention here that before WWII, anti-Semitism was not felt. It certainly existed, but it was not encouraged from *above*. Jewish youths could enter colleges and universities minus some very prestigious ones without any percentage limitations. After the war, the situation changed dramatically. But people always hope for the best. Nobody anticipated such changes.

Before my leaving for the Ukraine, I learned that in Kiev professionals were wanted, especially those who know foreign languages. A thought occurred to me to write a letter to the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as they must be in need of translators. Father supported my initiative. So I decided to take the opportunity to write a letter to them describing my experience and education. To my great surprise, in two weeks I received an answer and it was quite encouraging. They wrote they needed

people like me and would be glad to have me in the capacity of a translator or a secretary. The letter filled me with hopes. There was but one thing that I had overlooked. My last name in their letter was slightly misspelled: One letter was changed. Instead of the next to last letter "i" was "u". This mistake proved fatal for me. The fact is that family names ending in *uk* are usually Ukrainian, while those in *ik* are not, they are, alas, Jewish. Nevertheless, I wrote to them again stating how much I appreciated their letter, and took the liberty to mention that I had no place to live in Kiev and had three members of the family depending on me: Father, Mother and a younger brother. Soon I received a very positive answer including the promise that they would see to it that I would receive some housing facilities for myself and my family. I was just ecstatic about such good news. In the same letter were enclosed forms to be filled in including the well-known fifth point-- nationality. I duly filled out all the questionnaires and sent them to Kiev. Alas, this time everything was clear, no misunderstanding. Their answer came with my name spelled correctly, not a single letter misspelled. They informed me rather coldly that at present they had no vacancies and promised to write if they would have any. They never wrote again.

I decided to go to Kharkov and to try my luck in the city in which I had lived almost all my life. With a document from the local education authorities, in which it was stated that I was sent to the districts of the Ukraine liberated from the German troops to work in schools, I set off for the Ukraine.

I RETURN TO KHARKOV

In October 1944, I arrived in Kharkov. It was for the first time in my life that I went alone on such a long trip, and nobody met me at the station of the city I had lived for more than 20 years.

The City of Kharkov only recently was in German hands. I didn't know whom of my friends and my fellow students I would see alive. I had to learn that some perished in the war or died of hunger, some died terrible deaths in the Kharkov ghetto, which was situated next to the territory of the Kharkov Tractor plant. More than 30 thousand Jews perished there. The expression at the tractor's (*na traktornom*) or *perished at the tractor's* acquired a very sad connotation.

Returning to Kharkov, I learned for the first time in my life what it meant to be homeless and lonely. I didn't live in the street, but I had no permanent place and never knew where I was going to spend the following night. Now I stayed at some friends of

my father's, now at some other place where my friends lived. To make the matters worse, I had no residence permit to live in Kharkov (though I had a pre-war Kharkov passport) and very often during the check-ups made by militia I had to hide. In the document I was given by the Sverdlovsk education authorities it was stated I had been sent to the regions of the Ukraine to teach at schools, Kharkov was not mentioned, though I asked them to do it.

To get a residence permit it was necessary to work, to have a job. When applying for a job, a residence permit is demanded. In a word it was a vicious circle. At present the situation is very little changed in this respect.

The situation with housing was catastrophic. Many houses were destroyed, lay in ruins, and the shortage of housing was much worse than before the war, though at that time it was also critical.

The house we lived in before the war was not demolished by bombs. The district was considered one of the best in the city and probably the Germans planned to live there longer and did not bomb it much. While quickly retreating from the city, they had no time to destroy the houses. Though the house we lived in before the war was not demolished, our apartment was occupied by a Russian family who thought us dead. When I met the head of the family, he threatened to kill me if I would try to approach his doorsteps. Later to be on the safe side, as he had taken up our apartment unlawfully during the German occupation, he sold it to two families, also illegally, but unfortunately I could do nothing about it. I believe that if Father had been the first to return to Kharkov instead of me, he would have managed to get back our apartment. At least it was possible to bargain with the man. But I was quite inexperienced in such matters. As they say in Russian: good ideas come too late. Afterwards when Father returned to Kharkov, it took him much time, efforts and health in trying to get back our apartment. But all was in vain.

For some time I lived with the family of my fathers friend's in a room where besides me lived four persons and a child. Then I moved to the apartment of our prewar neighbors on the same landing with our former apartment, trying to avoid the man who had threatened to kill me. Once I met a friend of mine and she invited me to live with her family. They were only three in two large rooms of a communal apartment with four more families. At first I was very happy: they were very kind to me, nice and intelligent people. But in a week I had to leave. There was such an enormous quantity of bedbugs and they were so large. I had never seen such large bugs before. Bugs are

always fond of newcomers and they attacked me every night so that I could not sleep at all. My friends were disappointed and surprised. They insisted there were no bugs. But I knew better and after thanking them for their hospitality I had to leave. It was easy for me to leave and to move, my belongings were few and light to carry: an old small suitcase and a rucksack. The sad point was that I was never sure where I would spend the next night.

To enumerate all the places I lived at would take a lot of room and time. Even now when I recollect those years of homelessness, hunger, cold and dirt I shudder and looking around me I cannot believe my eyes: I am in a separate (in Russian we use the word isolated), light and clean apartment with all conveniences, about some of them I've never heard before. I am surrounded by people so kind and willing to help me. I enjoy the privacy I could only dream of. All this makes me think of the sufferings and hardships my parents and I had to live through. The way I live now in Milwaukee seems to me like a dream, a miracle.

Well, to go on with my story, besides the necessity to have a shelter one must have something to eat every day. And that was a second big problem for me. Being an unlawful inhabitant in Kharkov without *propiska* I had no ration card and at the black market a loaf of bread cost seventy rubles, which was not much less than the average month wages.

I discovered a cheap restaurant where they served thin watery soup with some groats and a small piece of bread, all this without demanding a ration card, which, alas, I didn't possess. What money did I lived on? Father sent me 100 rubles every month, it was more than half of his salary, but it could not cover a minimum demand for food. Sometimes I managed to earn some rubles working as a loader. Such kind of work stimulated appetite terribly, however the money earned was not enough for a decent meal. As to finding some work at school, the absence of propiska made it impossible. Once they offered me a job at school. The school was in such a faraway district, the city transportation system did not work, I could not take this job.

The situation seemed hopeless, I was at a loss what to do . I even began to think of returning back to the Urals, to my parents. But it would be a complete retreat and a betrayal to my brother and my parents who were dreaming to return to Kharkov as soon as possible. They say there are no hopeless situations without some way out. An idea struck me to become a student once more. The students got Kharkov permits and ration cards. For this purpose I had to conceal the fact that I was already a graduate of

the University. Fortunately at that time there was such a mess in the institutions, many documents and archives had been burned before Kharkov was occupied by the Germans that I could pretend I was entering the college for the first time. And that was how I became a student for the second time. My friends had urged me to enter a technical college; canteens were much better there. But I decided, if I did have to study again, it must be languages. Technical subjects were not in my line and difficult to master with the stomach half empty. And so I entered the English department of Kharkov Teacher's College. I received the long-awaited *propiska* at a students *hostel* and ration-card. I was not given a place to live in the hostel though, because there were no vacant places, but I was no longer afraid of the militia: I had an official permit to live in Kharkov, and my friends at whose apartment I lived were not afraid to have me. I became again a permanent resident of the city I had lived before the war.

As far as jobs were concerned it was not easy. I could get a job: hands were necessary everywhere. But they paid so little that with the month's wages you could hardly buy a loaf of bread and some vegetables. It is true I possessed now a much treasured ration card and could buy a pound of bread in a state shop every day certainly after standing for some time in the line. It was already something compared with my previous situation of a person without any elementary rights, but it was not enough.

I FOUND A JOB

Having no definite occupation and no place to be in the daytime, I decided to visit my alma mater, Kharkov University. I hoped to see some friends, probably some former instructors who could help me to find a job. And here finally Lady Luck smiled on me. I met a friend of mine with whom I had studied at the English courses before the war and it turned out she was teaching English at the University. She introduced me to the head of the English chair. After talking English with him for a short time, I was offered a part-time job to teach English to science students. I had to inform him that I had no diploma either in philology or in linguistics. But he found my English good enough and said that my higher education diploma in mathematics and mechanics would do. He was glad though when I informed him I was majoring in English at the Teacher's college. After some negotiations and some red-tape I began to teach English at the University.

At that time after so many losses sustained during the war (in 1944 the war was still going on) demand for teachers and students was great. The personnel department of the University was not very strict in hiring people. A few years later I would not be

admitted even with three diplomas and degrees because of my being Jewish. The salary I received was very low (350 rubles a month, it is equivalent to 35 rubles or 7 dollars nowadays). I couldn't refuse receiving parents aid, which made me feel very miserable. I knew very well it was not easy for Father to send me 100 rubles every month. My parents tried to encourage and reassure me that they lived better now, that they had enough bread and even had stopped dividing it into portions.

My university career began at the end of 1944 and went on for more than 30 years. I retired in 1978.

In 1944 Kharkov University presented a very sad picture. The principle university building in downtown was old and half ruined. Since 1804 when the university was founded by the famous liberal public figure V. Karazin no new premises were built and no serious restoration work done. During the German occupation the principal building was used as stables for horses. That was the way of humiliating Ukrainian culture. The most valuable books and ancient manuscripts were taken out by Germans and sent to Germany. The quantity of students at the beginning of my work was 350 comparing with 10-12 thousands before the War.

At present the University, which is the second oldest higher education establishment in the Soviet Union (after Moscow University) has more than 20 thousand students and some new halls were erected.

To return to 1944 I must mention again my work in agriculture. Hardly had I begun my career at the University, when I was sent to work on the collective farm. After such hard and hungry years during the evacuation it was almost unbearable to find oneself once more in the capacity of a farmhand. Since other teachers and students had already worked on the farms that year, I was sent to work with charwomen and janitors and we were given very difficult day assignments which, hard as I tried, I could not fulfil. Two months of such work, seemed endless. We were sleeping on bedboards covered with some hay, all of us 70 persons (men and women), in one large barn, having very poor meals twice a day, not enough water to wash ourselves.

We were not paid anything for the work. We were considered *volunteers*. Though we were entitled for some kilograms of flour, I didn't receive anything on the ground that I hadn't always fulfilled the quota.

The conditions of work and studies at the University were far from being normal. In

fact they were terrible. There was no heating system and some separate stoves of very old type were never kindled because of the lack of fuel. In the classrooms, the students and the lecturers were in their winter coats or padded jackets, the ink was frozen, textbooks not available, laboratory equipment was old and out of date. Among the students there were many young war veterans. They had certain privileges comparing with the students who entered colleges and universities straight from high-schools. And so I worked as a lecturer teaching English. My housing conditions, alas, remained the same. By American standards I was homeless. True I was put on the waiting list for the teaching staff.

The prospects for receiving a room were not promising. First of all, the waiting list was very long and the rooms and apartments available very few. Secondly, the commission dealing with finding dwelling space and distributing it had worked very hard at the beginning until all the big bugs and party members received rooms or even apartments. But when it came to ordinary instructors, the activity of the commission fell down dramatically and we were urged to be patient and to take into account the shortage of dwellings fit for human habitation in our city with many houses lying in ruins. To make the long story short, I never got a room through the University. In spite of the fact that my direct chief said that he would never know rest until I got a room, he very quickly found rest when he himself received an apartment. One more circumstance proved to be fatal. At the head of the commission was professor Polyakov, an outstanding geneticist, and it was the time when genetics was proclaimed false doctrine. A real fight began against geneticists, Professor Polyakov was fired and the work of the commission practically stopped.

I went on living in the same house where our family lived before the war, but in a different apartment having at my disposal a corner of the room, I shared with three other women. It was not very convenient to live in a room like this. The only positive thing I was not afraid of the militia: my passport had the necessary seal and a note of the permit to live in Kharkov. I was, so to speak, a lawful Kharkov inhabitant without a single square meter of housing space to my credit.

OUR FAMILY IS REUNITED

At that time another important event took place. I happened to meet Father's prewar fellow-employee. He was Ukrainian, a party member into the bargain. He was quickly promoted and became director of a cardboard factory situated near Kharkov. He told me he was looking for a good accountant and asked me to write

to Father if he would be interested in such a job, which I did at once. Soon the answer came, Father was so eager to return to native parts that he agreed immediately. Soon my parents and my brother arrived in Kharkov. Unfortunately I could not meet them. I was working on the collective farm at that time and was not allowed to leave for Kharkov to meet my family. In some days after their arrival Karl came to the farm I worked at and was greatly upset at seeing me hungry, dirty and miserable.

With the parents and Karl's returning to Kharkov it became merrier to live but the housing problem was by no means solved. Parents got an apartment near the factory which was situated 15-20 miles from Kharkov. By American standards it must sound okay, the distance not long. But it was quite different with us. There were no private cars at that time (even now not many people own cars), no good road to Rogan, the small town where the factory was situated, no bus transportation to the factory. It was only on weekends that my brother and I could get to our parents. It took us a long time and great efforts to get there. The only possibility was to have a lift in some passing truck going there. The trip was far from being comfortable, all the guts were terribly shaken up in the truck with many people packed like sardines to say nothing of some load the driver had to deliver. For the driver it was some extra money for vodka, every *passenger* had to pay his fare. Coming at last to parents, we felt like in a paradise. Mother used to prepare dishes we liked. Everything seemed so delicious to us, make our mouths water when we saw our favorite ladkes and other dishes being put on the table. Those weekends were the happiest days in our lives after the war. Unfortunately they began late on Saturday evening. Saturday was a working day at that time. Even now the majority of Saturdays are called *black*, because people are supposed to work *voluntarily* on them. Our parents were watching us eat up hurriedly everything that was put on the table. The scene was quite pathetic. After the meal there were long talks. We were dreaming about the times we could at last live together in Kharkov.

The problem of some dwelling place for Karl and myself in Kharkov was not settled. As a matter of fact it became more critical and more difficult to solve. Before, we needed some place to live for one person, i.e. myself. Now we wanted a dwelling for two persons, my brother and myself, of different sexes to boot. Karl had managed to get a transfer from Sverdlovsk polytechnical college to a Kharkov one. The college he was transferred to had no vacant places in their hostel. It was true of all other hostels in the city. The students had to rent the so-called *ugly*, i.e. corners in apartments or rooms.

Both Father and I began to look for some room or at least an *ugol* for Karl and me. It was a very difficult task indeed. No ads in the newspapers, the overwhelming majority

of houses belonged to the state and subletting rooms was often considered speculation of state property. Subletting was done *quietly*, pretending that new dwellers were some distant relatives. The permit to live in the apartment was not granted. It was possible to live without it though, having a permit to live in a hostel.

At the same time Father filed a complaint to the court trying to prove our rights to our prewar apartment. As I have mentioned, our apartment was sold to two families for a large sum of money. It was certainly unlawful transaction, but it turned out very difficult to prove our rights. Father sued both families but the results were negative. Those families paid to the lawyers many times more than Father could afford. The judge also received a nice little sum from them. To us he said that we had lost our rights to the apartment because we had not paid rent during the occupation period. As if we could have paid rent to the Hitlerites. The jury consisting of two persons, called peoples assesors, never played any important part in the court decision. They always acted and act in the way the judge wants them to , forming with the judge the so-called *troika*.

The results of Father's going to the court were detrimental to his health, which was already shaken by years of hunger and privations. The cold roomlet I shared with Karl on a temporary basis was a source of constant worries for our parents. By chance Father managed to solve this problem for us.

On the 9th of May 1945, the Victory day, after many hours of futile attempts to find some more convenient room, we found ourselves in the central part of the city with festivities and fireworks around us and crowds of people celebrating the great victory. Here we happened to meet a friend of Father's . Learning about our plight, he suggested that Karl and I might live in their connecting room. They had two rooms in a communal apartment by American standards, it is one-bedroom apartment.

When Father asked about the rent, his friend was hurt and said there could be no question about money between friends and people from the same parts. He was also from Kalinkovichi.

And so we moved to a new apartment once more. At the beginning everything was okay. But after some time passed our landlord's wife demanded that Father should supply them with coal and some foodstuffs. For a couple of months Father did his best and brought some coal and potatoes from Rogan. The cost of these goods exceeded Father's salary and he could not afford such a rent. So we had to move again.

Our next *apartment* was a small room without any elementary conveniences, opening directly into the yard. It was terribly cold in fall and winter. There was a stove which was to be heated with coal and firewood. Father took care about the coal. The trouble was that I could never make the stove work properly. Either the room became full of smoke or the stove didn't give heat enough to warm us a little. I'll remember that roomlet till my dying day.

Sometimes Mother would come from Rogan to see us with something in her basket to eat. That was a real holiday. Beside bringing something tasty to eat, Mom managed with the stove much better than I did. Such visits couldn't be frequent unfortunately because of the lack of transportation means.

Father's work at the factory proved very difficult and the working environment most unpleasant, to say the least. Director of the factory, Father's former fellow employee and friend, became very anti-Semitic. That was the time of purges, the time of open anti-Semitic policy, which was pursued under the pretext of fighting cosmopolitism. The word cosmopolitan in the Soviet Union was not used in the usual way as denoting a person not narrow-minded, having wide experience of different people and places, but a s a person hostile to the country he lives in, that is to the Soviet Union. In fact, it was synonymous to the ill-fated term *enemy of the people*. In the majority of cases it was Jews who were labeled cosmopolitans. They were fired, humiliated, arrested, tortured. Many pogrom articles calling to fight cosmopolitans, to do away with them, appeared in the leading newspapers. To make it crystal clear that the whole campaign is directed against Jews, many pennames were revealed as belonging to Jews. It was done in allegedly innocent ways by giving in brackets after pennames the real names, patronimics included.

Jews were relieved from all more or less responsible party posts. In the central party organs there had been no Jews for a long time. In fact Jews were thrown out from almost all important and not so important jobs. All these measures certainly triggered anti-Semitism to say nothing about the influence of Hitlerite propaganda on the former occupied territories. The situation was highly explosive.

Director, while speaking with Father, always justified different measures against Jews. He said there must be reasons why the Jews were thrown out from different posts, hinting at their disloyalty. Father could hardly go on working under such circumstances. He used to return from his work quite exhausted and depressed. At last he said he could stand it no more and decided to quit this job. We all supported his

decision, the more so that living divided into two families was quite expensive with our modest income. Father was now to look for some job in the city. The big problem now was to find some room to live in . Before it was a problem for two persons, Karl and myself, now it was a problem to find a room for four of us. Meanwhile parents were allowed to live for a month in their rooms in Rogan and my brother and I lived in the same roomlet as before. All of us were doing our best to find some temporary shelter, but we couldn't. We were almost in despair.

At that time a friend of mine told me about a vacancy at the library of the Ukrainian Physico-Technical Institute in Kharkov. It was a very prestigious institution, many outstanding physicists, including L. Landau, E. Lifshits and others worked there. They wanted a librarian with the knowledge of foreign languages. The library consisted of scientific books and journals in English, French, German and Russian as well. They wanted me to take this post and promised to give me a room. The last circumstance was crucial. The only obstacle was I didn't want to quit my work at the University and there was a law forbidding to work at two places. At least a special permission was necessary from the University authorities. I managed to get such permission, arguing that my family had no room to live while the University could not accommodate me with one. So I began to work in UFTI, my salary at the University was cut by 50%.

Soon we were given a room on the territory of the Institute. It was in a walk-up, on the fourth floor without any conveniences, no bathroom, no running water, no kitchen. A very small ante-room we shared with our neighbors. It had three doors, one led to our room, the second, to our neighbors' and the third to the staircase landing. By agreement with our neighbors who had two rooms in the same apartment we used the ante-room as auxiliary premise for cooking. We put there a small table with a primus on it and three pails: one for fresh water and two for different garbage. The water we had to carry up from the basement.

In spite of the lack of conveniences we were very glad to have a room for ourselves. Our room was 16 square meters large (about 150 square feet). After all my trials, all the months and years of homelessness, I was so happy to return to our room with Mother waiting for us with hot dishes. To be sure it was not easy to have two jobs, a couple of private lessons (that is the way we call tutoring) and to run form one place to another all day long. But I was young, full of hopes and was happy to be a breadwinner for our family.

Soon Father also found a job which involved work in a Kharkov office and also some

business places in the Kharkov oblast (district). We didn't become rich but in comparison with what we had had to go through during the war years, we felt ourselves quite well-to-do.

At that time (it was 1946) my friend Lyova Livshits was demobilized. Before the war we were students of the same department of physics and mathematics at Kharkov University. He studied at the physical chair and I at the mathematical one. He entered the University a year before I did. We were on friendly terms, though not on very close ones. When we met after the war our friendship grew much stronger. We often met, often walked together. I must confess those were very happy days indeed. My work at the institute library contributed much to our friendship.

After the war Lyova became a research worker at the same institute I was in charge of the library. Many a time he would come to the library not only for a book but to see me as well. I came to like Lyova very much and he didn't seem indifferent to me. He was a very nice, honest and reserved guy. Before the war he finished the machine-building technical school and after working for a year at a plant entered the physical department of the university. He joined the Army as a volunteer soon after the beginning of the war, was an officer in the infantry unit, went through all the horrors of our army retreat and advance, twice was very seriously wounded. The first time he got wounded in 1943 by a German sharpshooter while trying to carry away his wounded friend. He didn't know his friend was already dead. The second time he was wounded on the German territory near Heilelberg. It was in 1945 during the offensive operations. He was taken to the hospital, was there for some months and soon the war was over. Lyova didn't like to speak about the war, never agreed to speak at the gathering where they usually glorified the war. What he told me about his war experience made my hair stand on end. Even in the tsarist army there weren't such atrocities against its own soldiers and officers. Shooting some soldiers and officers for different offences and without them before the ranks, so that it should be a good lesson to others, was a usual procedure before the offensive. Very often the soldiers executed were innocent people, not deserters. No leaves as a rule were given to the wounded soldiers after staying in hospitals, while even in the German army such leaves were granted. Contrary to German infantry, ours was real infantry (in Russian *pyekhota* meaning soldiers on foot). If the soldier was demobilized becoming usually a cripple and being no more of use to the army, he had to return his high boots and his great coat. Only at the end of the war this rule was abolished. The families of the soldiers did not receive any help from the government while their breadwinners were in the army, nor any compensation if they perished. Only officers' families were eligible for some allowance, it was a part of the

salary the officers received. The privates didn't receive anything for their service in the army, but a few rubles for cigarettes.

During the recent inglorious Afghan war the families of soldiers who had perished during the hostilities received 300 rubles for their sons or husbands, which according to present currency rate is equal to $50.00 As to prisoners of war, Stalin didn't even admit the existence of such a category. In his opinion, they were all deserters. Being Supreme Commander-In-Chief of the Soviet Army, Stalin used to give orders that soldiers should not be spared. It is not for me to describe the war conducted by the totalitarian state with the barrage detachments*that were shooting in the backs of those who had to advance in the offensive and many other horrible and unbelievable things. (*Those detachments were liquidated after the Stalingrad Victory). For instance, before retreating from Kharkov, our soldiers had to destroy all the goods in the shops. It was directed naturally against the Germans, but the inhabitants of Kharkov were left to starve. Those who are interested in the way the so-called Great Pabriotic war was conducted should read books by General Grigorenko. He was stripped of all his ranks and awards and deported from the country for telling the truth.

LYOVA AND I MARRY

To return to my personal story. Lyova and I never touched the question of marriage, though we became very close friends and much attached to each other. We were well aware of a serious obstacle to our union: we had no place to live and no prospects in the near future.

Lyova lived with his parents in a room with no conveniences in the old part of the city He got this room because he was a veteran of the war. Veterans who before the war lived in the city were eligible for some housing in this city. It was not easy to realize his rights. He went through a hell before he received this room for his parents and himself. It was out of the question to get one more room for himself and his wife. More *energetic* veterans returning from the ranks and finding their rooms occupied by the so-called *ostavantsy*, that is those who stayed on the occupied territory during the war, just stormed the rooms, threw out the occupants and their belongings. It was certainly unlawful, but the militia could not do anything about it.

We were both at a loss: to find a room to live in the city with so many houses demolished during the war was next to impossible. But as the saying goes: *every dog has its day*. Lyova received a room at the institute hostel. He hastened to invite me to see it.

Since he never formally asked me to marry him in the way people do it in the novels, I pretended I did not understand him and said: "Why should I see it?" He answered,"You are a better judge of such things". I could not stand it any longer and asked him point blank: "Does it mean you want to marry me and that I should be a housewife in this room"? The answer was something like: "Sure. Could you think otherwise"? I was certainly disappointed that such an important occasion in the woman's life was not solemn at all in my case.

In 1947 Lyova and I got married. Our family life began. We even had a kind of honeymoon. Father succeeded in getting two *putyovkas* (vouchers) for a sanatorium near the Azov Sea, where we spent our vacation. It was a good gift from my father.

The sanatorium turned out less comfortable than could be expected. It was in the process of making and repair. We were accommodated in different rooms, each with five other inmates. The meals left much to be desired and bread was rationed to boot. But we had the sea, a nice sand beach, a blue sky and each other's company. What more could we desire after those terrible war years. We were happy and enjoyed our vacation immensely. We returned to Kharkov full of dreams and plans for the future.

One dream has already come true: we had a separate room. Though, not large (about 9 X 12 sq. feet) and without any closets to put our not numerous belongings, but it was our own room and had some conveniences, such as central heating, running water, a wash basin and a toilet. The conveniences were shared by all the tenants of the floor. At the end of the long passage there was a communal kitchen. There was neither a bathroom nor a shower. A bathhouse was some blocks away. In spite of those shortcomings I was ecstatic with our room. Returning from my work the first thing I would do is wash the floor. It was necessary to do so since we had no furniture and slept on the floor.

The furniture factories did not work at that time and only handicraftsmen made some primitive pieces of furniture such as wardrobes, cupboards, tables and chairs, everything was rather expensive. We just began to save some money for future buys.

Meanwhile some of Lyova's friends brought us an old sofa, and from Lyova's laboratory we were allowed to take a large laboratory table and two chairs. Our first purchase was a table. We could at last get rid of the laboratory table which occupied half of our room. True, it also served as a wardrobe, a writing table and chest of drawers combined. Now we hammered some nails in the wall and there we hung our

clothes.

As to the communal kitchen, the neighbors did not let me use it. It was really very small and there seemed to be no room to squeeze one more little table on which a small electric stove with one burner could be put. Well, I had to put that little table into the corner to have a kind of kitchenette in our only room. In a couple of months our neighbors seemed to have softened their attitude. They came to us, took out our kitchen table and solemnly installed in into the kitchen, thus acknowledging our right to use the communal kitchen. They did it on their own initiative and Lyova and I appreciated this kind act.

Everything seemed to be good, but a big problem arose. Here in the United States one can often hear *no problem*. In the Soviet Union the situation is just the opposite. One is confronted with problems literally at every step. Our big problem now was housing for my parents and brother. After getting married I could not manage to have two jobs and to fulfil my household duties. I certainly didn't want to lose my job at the University, so I had to quit my work at the institute library. Soon I was notified to vacate the room my parents and my brother lived. The room was on the territory of the institute and such rooms were given only to those who worked at the institute.

I did my best running from morning till night trying to find some place to live for my parents and brother. At last I managed to find two small rooms. They were in a suburb in a one-storied small house. Part of the house was occupied by the landlord and his family, and a small part they rented. The agreement was that I pay 6,000 rubles and my parents and brother don't pay anything during two years and after two years' time they may go on occupying those rooms, paying 50 rubles a month. I paid the necessary sum (it was all my savings before my marriage) and with Lyova we had to begin our married life with a scratch. He also had to help his parents.

I wished I could find a better *apartment* for my parents. The house was far from being attractive, low-ceilinged with outside conveniences. The water pump was a block away, the stove to be heated with coal and firewood. I certainly felt pricks of conscience for being unable to rent a better apartment for my parents. I knew they deserved something better. But was I to blame? Was it too egotistic of me to want to get married and have my own family at the age of 28 after so many privations and suffering?

Lyova's parents, my in-laws, also lived in a room, which served them as a sitting-room, a bedroom and a kitchen combined, with no conveniences. Such were the

housing conditions of the majority of the population in the Soviet Union, especially on the territories temporarily occupied by the Germans.

Both Lyova and I worked very much. I had very little time to attend to my household duties, though I tried hard to do all I could. At least once a week Mother would come and prepare meals for us. Everything went well and we were full of hopes for the better future.

In two years' time Lyova was given a better room. It was not much larger than the one we had in the hostel, but it was in an apartment house and we had now only one family to share the apartment with. It consisted of two persons: a man and a wife and they seemed to be quite decent people. There were necessary conveniences and at last we had a bathroom. We didn't have to go to a public bathroom any more, the institution we had to go to almost all our lives. We enjoyed our new convenience greatly in spite of the fact that we had to share it with our neighbors. I would like to mention here that living most of my adult life in communal apartments I was lucky enough to have good (the better word would be tolerable) neighbors. I don't mean that having neighbors in the same apartment is not a nuisance. It is. No wonder that people in the Soviet Union say: *I an fond of all people minus my neighbors.*

We didn't complain, and as the Americans say, took it easy and were happy, patient and hopeful. As I mentioned already I quit my work at the library and now had a full time job at the University. When in a couple of years a special department of foreign languages was opened I was transferred there from ESL chair and received a promotion. I became a senior instructor. Besides I was also tutoring (gave private lessons in English, as we say in Russian). We wanted to save some money for furniture. We even began to think about a refrigerator. At that time it was considered a luxury. In Russia they just began to produce them for individual use. There were very long waiting lists for them, so it wasn't an immediate problem.

We managed to save some money, which was not much and began to look for some pieces of furniture. However, it turned out there were other priorities. The parents' landlord, having quickly squandered the money we paid for the right to live in the apartment during two years, wanted to evict my parents. The pretext was, his daughter gave birth to a child and now they needed more floor space. Though according to the law and the agreement signed my parents could live there for 2 years without paying rent (on the deposit we paid) and later on continue living there paying rent, the landlord filed a complaint to the court demanding my parents' eviction. Though the

decision of the court was not in his favor, it became practically impossible for my parents to go on living there. The landlord began to use physical methods and the life in the house became unbearable. It was necessary to do something. To expect any help from our socialist state was hopeless. It could not give shelter even to demobilized veterans returning from the war, neither to the families of perished officers and men. The only way out for us was to buy some apartment in a small house in some suburb of Kharkov. Such apartments in small houses, unfortunately without conveniences, were sometimes sold. They represented a remnant of private property permitted by our socialist economy.

Father found such an apartment and the price was 20,000 rubles. He didn't have the money, our savings for furniture (8,000 rubles) had to go. The rest of the sum Father borrowed from some friends. Lyova behaved in this respect very nobly. When I raised the question about giving our savings to Father, he agreed. Only once I heard him say that other fathers give their daughters some dowry, but that didn't happen in his case. He never mentioned the matter again. Father meant to pay back the money to us. But first he had to repay the debts to his friends. And this he managed to do. However later on his health began to deteriorate and he could not work any more. The terrible years of the war with its hunger and privations told on him terribly. So his debt to us remained unpaid.

Father was very glad and very proud to have at last a dwelling place he could call his own. There was a small yard near the house with lilac bushes and some other trees. He even planted a tree and some flowers. He could do , however, very little because his health continued to deteriorate. Doctors said it was emphysema and they could do very little about it. Father had been a heavy smoker all his life. He gave up smoking only at sixty when he began to have difficulties with breathing, but it was too late.

In February 1957 he died of emphysema. That was the first grave loss in our family. I took my father's death very much to heart. Though grown up, I felt like an orphan. Father was a very close friend for me, always trying to help me in every possible way. In spite of having my mother, brother and Lyova, I was very deeply depressed. Father died in a hospital and the conditions there left much to be desired, to put it mildly. There were almost no nurses and the last two months of Father's staying in the hospital Mother and I were allowed to be with Father day and night. In turn, Mother and I slept on the floor near Father's bed, ready every moment to render any help in our power.

Lyova and I had a very short period which can be called happy, with no serious

troubles and problems, at least we didn't think much of them. It lasted till 1951 when Lyova's father fell ill. A strong heart attack happened when my father-in-law was in the workshop. He lost consciousness because of strong pains and fell down. He was brought home in a car and only then the ambulance was sent for. The doctor that came with the ambulance refused to take him to the hospital saying that the patient would hardly be able to stand the transportation. As a matter of fact they didn't want to hospitalize people who were in a critical condition not to *worsen* the death statistics of the hospital, giving different excuses. In general, medical service in the U.S.S.R., though formally free, is in a very poor state. This was admitted now in the period of so-called *glasnost* by the Minister of Health himself.

For some months Lyova and I had to come almost everyday to help Lyova's mother to take care of the patient. It was terribly difficult to combine work, taking care of the invalid and doing something at one's own home, to say nothing of reading for the lectures at the University. To make matters worse, the room of my in-laws, though not small by Soviet standards, had no conveniences whatsoever except electricity. But at that time no electrical appliances were allowed, to say nothing that they were not for sale. So it was a very difficult time for all of us. It was a miracle that my father-in-law remained alive. He certainly could not work. He received a very meager temporary disability allowance.

As they say, it never rains but it pours. In Russian this idea is formulated somewhat differently *misfortunes never come singly.*

In March 1953, in some days after Stalin's death, many Jews in different kinds of institutions and research institutes were fired without any explanations of reasons. To those who inquired about such unprecedented step the answer was *staff reduction.* It was so to speak, manifestation of vigilance on the part of our party organs. It happened after the notorious case of doctors charged with murdering people. The majority of the doctors were Jews, so a terrible anti-Semitic campaign was triggered from *above.* If it were not for the death of the dictator, the second holocaust would have taken place, this time directed against Soviet Jews, who lost 2 million people.

Stalin devised a devilish plan to *solve* the Jewish question. After the doctors show trial he planned to deport all the Soviet Jews to Birobidzhan allegedly for their own good to *save* them from the people's wrath. Everything was prepared for this deportation including the necessary documents. Barracks were built for half of the deportees, the second half was supposed to die of hunger and privations on the way to

camps. Truly Stalin was no better than Hitler, quite a match for him. Thank God the tyrant died before his terrible plan was realized!

Soon after Stalin's death, the doctors were found not guilty and freed.Many of them remained cripples for life because of the tortures they underwent.The woman who had *disclosed* the doctors' plot perished in an accident. It was revealed by the media there had been no doctor's plot.

LYOVA LOSES HIS JOB

In spite of all these revelations, many Jews were fired from different institutions without any reasonable explanations. Lyova was among twenty research workers fired from the physical institute he worked at. Among them were some war veterans including Lyova. All the twenty minus one (a confirmed drunkard) were Jews. It is worth mentioning that no unemployment allowance was paid. The situation is the same at present, now the question began to be discussed, though. When an employee or worker is fired, he received payment for two weeks ahead only. It was quite logical from the point of view of the authorities. Since the existence of unemployment was not acknowledged, there is no necessity for allowance. Only now, in the epoch of limited glasnost, it was revealed that in the Soviet Union there are more than 20 million unemployed and more unemployed are expected to emerge as a result of *perestroika.*

So Lyova became unemployed. The situation was not only sad, but also dangerous. According to Constitution everybody must work and the right to work is supposedly guaranteed. If a person doesn't work, he is considered a parasite and may be even deported from the city.

Lyova wrote complaints to the trade union branch of his institute, to director and even to the Council of Ministers of the U.S.S.R., trying to prove that his dismissal was unlawful, and so it was. However, nothing came out of it. Worse than that, they refused to hire Jews on various pretexts. During a year Lyova could not find a job anywhere. There were vacancies, but as soon as they learned he was a Jew, they gave a negative answer on some pretext. To know the nationality of the applicant is a very simple matter, either the last name leaves no doubts, or the passport is required, in which the so-called fifth point (nationality) is always given.

At that time Lyova's father did not work either, because he was too weak after the heart disease he had gone through. He received a very meager disability allowance and

certainly we helped. When Lyova lost his job, my father-in-law refused to take financial help from us, saying that now it was only I who worked, and he began looking for a job. Besides he knew that my parents also needed some help as my father's health was in a very poor state too.

Meanwhile Lyova went on looking for a job, with no results. To find a job for a Jew was almost out of the question. Only manual low paying jobs were available for Jews. At last with the help of some friends Lyova managed to get a post of physics teacher in a technical school. Later on he got a job of a research worker in a department of the polytechnical college. It was an auxiliary department where sometimes Jews were also admitted. The work was temporary. Only in 1962 he got a post at a physical research institute, which was really in his line and to his liking. After some time he defended his thesis. He also had some inventions and patents to his credit. He worked at this institute for about 14 years till 1976 when he passed away. It was the third infarction he died of . With two serious wounds he got during WWII and so many troubles with looking for a job, alas, he was not destined to live long. He was sixty when he died.

We lived together for 29 years and all those years except for the first four we had problems of poor housing conditions of our parents on both sides. Our own housing conditions also left much to be desired. We had a small room in a communal apartment, here in the U.S. it would be called a studio but we shared the kitchen and bathroom with our neighbors. After Father's death in 1957 and my brother's marriage, three of us had to share one room: Mother, Lyova and me. And we were not eligible to be put on a waiting list, because we had what was considered the norm per capita floor space — 9 x 6 square feet. Only those having smaller living space could be put on the waiting list.

Besides eternal housing problems we had to take care of some invalid of our family. At first it was Lyova's father, then my father, later on Lyova's father again and Lyova's mother. As I have already mentioned the health service in the U.S.S.R., though it is, so to speak, free, is very poor indeed. Very small sums are allocated to hospitals. As a result patients are not nourished properly and it is necessary to bring food to the inpatients daily. They are not looked after well, so their relatives must come and help. In every ward there are sometimes more than 6 or even 10 patients. There is not enough fresh air as a rule. Woe to the patient who has no relatives: he is hungry and neglected at a hospital. To provide a modest care from assistant nurses, you have to tip them. Unlawful as it is, it a widespread. The doctors are not sinless in this respect either. One may add that it is necessary to wait for a long time to get a cot in a hospital. The majority of hospitals are in old premises, the equipment is out-of-date, the doctors

overworked and underpaid and very often of low skills.

In 1966 Lyova fell ill with a serious heart attack (infarction). He was not taken to a hospital and with my mother's help we looked after him as well as we could. He recuperated comparatively well. But in five years' time one more attack followed.

This time he was taken to the hospital. He felt much worse than after the first attack, constantly suffering from coronary disease. In spite of such state of health, after leaving the hospital and having some rest, he returned to his work, flatly refusing to quit it. In 1976 he died of the third heart attack.

The way he died also illustrates the Soviet health system and its alleged care for its people On the 17th of March my husband felt heart spasms. A tablet of nitroglycerine didn't help. I decided to call the ambulance, but he didn't let me do it, saying there was nothing serious, no necessity to bother medical people. However I insisted, and soon an ambulance arrived. The doctor after short examination and interrogation asked my husband if he was ever injected with strofantin and what the reaction was. Lyova said he was and it was all right with him. Then something bad happened. Either the doctor of the ambulance overdosed or she added some other medicine, but after the injection my husband became much worse, he began to suffocate. Not all the ambulances in the Soviet Union are supplied with necessary equipment. The doctor called over the telephone for another specialized ambulance. Meanwhile I was told to put hot bottles to Lyova's hands and feet, they began to cool. Some other ambulances came with no result. The doctors discussed the possibility of transporting the patient to the hospital. No use describing in what state I was.

At 12 midnight they said they could not save Lyova at home, he must be taken to the hospital. It turned out they had no hospital attendants, so there was nobody to carry my husband to the ambulance car. I was quite frustrated and could not utter a word. They told me to ask my neighbors for help (it was midnight!). On our landing there lived a middle-aged couple with three grown-up sons. Fortunately on that night they were at their parents'. I had nothing to do but wake them up and they carried my husband to the ambulance car. My task was to hold the dripping appliance. When the patient was in the ambulance, I was told that my help was not wanted any more. But I insisted on going to the hospital with my husband. In the ambulance Lyova seemed to be a little better and even asked me not to worry. It destined to be the last talk we had. When we came to the hospital, they took the patient to the surgery and I was asked to go home. I cried and protested, saying I must be near my husband when he was in such a critical

state. At least they must allow me to wait in the hall. I couldn't go home alone in the middle of the night leaving my husband, my home miles away. However, they were adamant in their inhumanity: a paramedic called a taxi, pushed me inside in spite of my protests and I had to leave. Before leaving I gave them my telephone number and they promised to give me a call if necessary. The taxi brought me home and all the night I was sitting near the telephone. There was no call. I thought is was a good sign.

On the following day, at 7 a.m., I was in the hospital with some oranges I bought at the market on the way. I asked to be let in to see my husband. But I wasn't allowed. After some time a doctor came to me to inform me that my husband had passed away at night. I only managed to say they should be put on trial for such health service. It was no use.

There are no funeral houses in the Soviet Union, only crematoriums in some big cities. The sad procedure is done either directly from the apartment or the room where the deceased lived or from the hospital he died in. Quite recently special rooms were established in hospitals in which bodies of the deceased were lying and then given to the relatives to be buried. There are a lot of time consuming procedures and red tape before the permission to bury is given. It is true that this unpleasant part by tradition is usually performed by more distant relatives or friends, the widow or the widower is spared all these troubles. It is not easy to find a proper place in the cemetery. It costs money, in simpler words, a bribe. Though the Soviet Union is considered to be a classless society, the classes do exist and there is no equality even after the death. The members of the so-called *nomenclatura* are buried in the cemeteries for the privileged or in special places in the graveyards for common people. Almost in every city there is a cemetery or a portion of the cemetery where only big shots are buried. In Moscow, for instance, it is the Novo-Devichie, which is a burial place for outstanding people and for those members of the Party, the Government, and the high ranking officers of the Soviet Army who were not honored to be buried in the Red Square. Khrushchev and Gromyko are among those buried there. There are some cemeteries for different nationalities and national minorities. Before WWII there was a Jewish cemetery in Kharkov, but during the German occupation it was razed to the ground and never restored. It was situated near the 3rd local cemetery, and now some part of the latter is given to Jews. That is the cemetery where my in-laws were buried, and it is also my husband's last resting place.

Unfortunately the place is neither restful nor peaceful. Before every Passover many Jewish graves are vandalized, monuments destroyed. It happened twice with my

husband's grave, once in 1980 when I still lived in the Soviet Union and after my departure in 1988.

It grieved me a lot to learn that in Kharkov my husband's grave was vandalized, the stone monument broken. To erect this monument cost me my year's pension, to say nothing of the pains to get the stone, good materials being given only to the party bosses. My brother who lives in Kharkov managed to restore somehow the monument, but how long it will stay undamaged nobody knows.

Anti-Semitism was always a big problem in the Soviet Union. The most unpleasant thing about it that it was encouraged from *above*, that is, from the Party and Government organs. It was done surreptitiously hypocritically, but it was an open secret for everybody. Even now, in the epoch of *glasnost* no great changes take place in this respect. There was no open frank statement condemning anti-Semitic organizations as *pamyat*. It is no wonder Soviet Jews are literally running away from the country that allegedly proclaimed the slogan of brotherhood of nations.

I REMAIN ALONE

Before my husband died we decided to retire because of his deteriorating state of health. The pensions in the Soviet Union are modest enough for the overwhelming majority of the population. Officially they must constitute not less than a half of what the salary or the wages were. But there is a limit to it: no more than 120 rubles a month (at present the limit was raised to 132 rubles)! Pensions are given only to those who worked not less than 25 years (for men) and 20 years (for women). Pensions for widows, disabled and veterans (of low rank) are very meager. For instance my mother after father's death, received 24 rubles a month, a handicapped relative — 20 rubles. Peasants (collective farmers) began to get pensions only recently. Large pensions, according to Soviet standards, were given to *nomenelatura* only. Thus, the late general secretary N. Khrushchov received 800 rubles a month.

Still Lyova and I decided to retire. I thought I could get some private lessons, i.e. to tutor in English or French But man proposes and the heavens dispose, as they say.

When I remained alone, (Mother died of kidney failure in 1971), I couldn't quit the job. It would have been very hard for me to be at home alone within four walls, as they say, giving way to despair and sad reminiscences.

I knew I had to work. So I went on working at the university for two more years, trying to concentrate all my thoughts and energy on my work. It was not easy to work at a Soviet University. In my case, as is the case with almost every lecturer or teacher, besides teaching English and some language-related subjects, every instructor, every lecturer had to be a propagandist as well. Each week we had to have the so-called political hours, i.e. talks with students about international affairs and *achievements* in the socialist construction in our country. Everything was to be *discussed* in the right spirit. This kind of activity was strictly watched and checked by the members of the party bureau of the department. In fact it was checked much more thoroughly than the lectures and seminars in the subjects the students were majoring in.

Though now I was spared going to collective farms every summer and fall, I had enough additional work to do for my colleagues who were sent to do some farm work with the students. With very poor and outdated equipment, preparing quizzes and some visual aids was a very time consuming business too.

And still I was lucky with my work and with my students. I liked my work. Teaching students and associate with them came easy with me. I was always on friendly terms with them, always ready to render them help in their studies. I was happy in enjoying respect and kindness from my students.

Everything comes to an end. The two last years of work at the University gone, I had to retire. It was not my habit to be idle and do nothing. So I began to study the subjects I was interested in but couldn't find time for while I was working. My basic interests were in linguistics and in studying the languages. When I studied at the University in Kharkov, I learned French at little. Now I had the opportunity to improve and, as the French say, to *profondir* it. besides I decided to learn Yiddish, which I understood but could not read or write. As to Hebrew, it was forbidden in the Soviet Union, being considered by our authorities the Zionist language. I managed to get a textbook published in Israel and began to study Hebrew secretly, so to speak, underground, hiding the book every time somebody knocked at the door.

I DECIDE TO EMIGRATE

The situation in the country became worse than ever, especially for Jews. I began to think about emigration. In 1978 to get a visa to emigrate was next to impossible. Only few people could manage to get permission to emigrate. However in 1979 the *weather* changed and many Soviet Jews were allowed to emigrate.

The thought to leave the country which had always been the stepmother even for the Russians, to say nothing about the Jews, began to stuck faster in my head. The more so that not long before his death, my husband and I discussed this problem. It was in the sphere of dreams though. Lyova worked in a *closed* research institute dealing with classified information and he would not be allowed to leave the country. However I remembered well his words: "If my health were better, I would take you out of this country, and you wouldn't have to work so much."

Now that I remained alone I became quite firm in my decision to leave the country. It was not at all an easy undertaking. In order to emigrate, an invitation from Israel was necessary. Many restrictions were on the way to emigration. The principal demands were: 1. having close relatives in Israel, 2. no close relatives in the U.S.S.R., who might follow your example. Both conditions were not met in my case. I had no close relatives in Israel and I had a brother in Kharkov. It was necessary to act through my Milwaukean relatives. But I had no address. After WWII our ties with Milwaukee were cut. During the Stalin regime corresponding with foreign countries was considered a crime. Our Milwaukee relatives were also restricted during the times of McCarthy. They weren't even aware whether we had survived the holocaust. A I learned later they were very anxious on our account.

I asked some people emigrating from the country to help me find my relatives. The result was always negative and I was at a loss what to do.

In 1979 many Jews were allowed to leave. About 50,000 people emigrated during the year. At that time I gave some private lessons, tutoring future immigrants in English. With one family I became especially friendly. They received the permission to emigrate and they promised to do all they could to find my Milwaukee relatives.

The first letter I received from the Sogolovs (that was their last name) was not very encouraging. To find somebody in the U.S.A., they wrote, it was necessary to pay money, which was not easy for new immigrants. Secondly, if such relatives were found, they were asked for permission to have their address given to their Russian relatives. I was sure that the second point would not be an obstacle in the case of my relatives. Nevertheless, I was greatly upset with this letter and was at a loss.

In two months, however, another letter came to Kharkov to the Sogolovs' in-laws and from them to me. I was greatly excited when I saw this letter. In it my second cousin Riva expressed thanks for finding me. She was going to New York, where the Sogolovs

lived, to find out more about me. I was reading the letter with tears in my eyes. They were the tears of happiness. At last, thank God, I found my far-away relatives who cared about me and who were ready to help me.

So the correspondence between Kharkov and Milwaukee, broken off by tragic events of WWII and the post war period of the cold war, was renewed. Before the war, it was the correspondence between my father and his brothers in Milwaukee, Shimon and Zusl. Now is was the ties between the members of the second generation, mainly between Shimon's daughter Bernice and me, Yudel's daughter.

I greatly enjoyed and appreciated my correspondence with Bernice. Every time I received a letter from her I felt very happy. It was a real holiday for me, a red-letter day. I read and reread her letters and didn't feel so lonely any more. The letters encouraged me, urged me to be patient. That was a very welcome encouragement. From the letters I also learned much about the life in America and the language spoken there. Though I had been studying and teaching English for many years, I knew it mostly form books. Now I felt the breath of the language the people of the U.S.A. speak.

In her letters Bernice used many idioms, and rightly suspecting that I might not understand some of them, rendered them into simpler words, thus explaining them to me. Her English is really wonderful and it was a great source for improving my rather artificial and bookish English. Besides at the educational establishments of the Soviet Union British English was taught and considered the pattern to be followed.

In one of my letters I wrote to Bernice about my desire to emigrate from Russia and received a very enthusiastic reply. She wrote she had been expecting such a decision for some time and would provide for me the so-called *vyzov* (invitation) through Israel. At that time such an invitation from Israel was the only possible way to get a visa and with it the permission to leave the country. I received such *vyzov*.

I BECOME A REFUSNIK

And here began my 7 year-long period of fighting for my right to emigrate. In a word, I became a refusnik, i.e. a person who wishes to emigrate and is not allowed to.

At present emigration from the Soviet Union is much easier, though it is difficult enough even now. Immigration to the U.S.A. is limited, immigration to Israel is

endangered by the Arab countries and PLO.

In the eighties up till 1987 to emigrate from Russia was next to impossible. The status of refusnik was a very unpleasant and even a dangerous status. Refusniks were deprived of almost all rights. They usually had to quit their jobs before submitting the documents to OVIR. Such preventive measure was absolutely necessary because in any case they would be fired as soon as the authorities find out about their plan to emigrate. Being a refusnik, which took very often many years,, meant having no right to employment in accordance with their profession. They could be hired for unskilled manual labor which is a very low paid kind of work. Professors, teachers and other intellectuals often worked as street sweepers, night watchmen, boiler-men and the like. On the other hand, if such people (refusniks) didn't work, i.e. didn't officially have some jobs, they are considered parasites, spongers; they are persecuted by militia and may be even deported from the city. With the passport system (which still exists at present), it is not difficult for the authorities to do so, and unfortunately it happened in many cases.

Many of my younger friends, my fellow sufferers, even envied my retired person status. There was no precedent of a pensioner deprived of his pension.

The attitude of neighbors to refusniks, who were considered traitors to their country, was unbearable. Anti-Semitism was on the rise. Paradoxical as it is, at present with some liberalization of the regime, anti-Semitism became really terrible. Using the word *some* is necessary indeed because no principle freedoms are quaranteed. No freedom of press, freedom of speech is limited, no free emigration, one-party system up till now to crown it all. The only consolation is that at present anti-Semitism does not seem to be encouraged from above. Much was written about it. It is not for me, a former *quiet* rank and file refusnik to describe it.

One of the most unpleasant procedures was to deal with OVIR (department of visas and permission to emigrate) and its KGB men. To apply for the permission to emigrate one must have an invitation from some relatives in Israel, they would not even speak to you without such an invitation. When you bring your application and the invitation, you are given a lot of forms to fill out.. A detailed biography is demanded covering also your ties with the people who sent you the invitation. You must also bring many papers and statements from the house management you lived in, from the places you worked, about your nearest relatives in the U.S.S.R., your photos and so on. It takes a lot of time and effort to do all this. The most unpleasant thing about it is that your wish to

emigrate is no longer a secret from the authorities and you become, so to speak, a suspect.

In two or three months they call you to OVIR just to inform you that you are not permitted to emigrate. The reasons for such a decision are usually not given. They simply state that it is not advisable for you to emigrate. When you ask what you can do, they tell you that you have the right to apply for the visa once more in six months' time. But for this you have to submit a new invitation form your relatives (the invitation is valid for 6 months) and once more go through the whole red-tape procedure.

Every time I went to OVIR I felt terrible about it. Still every time there was a vague hope. And every time during seven years of being a refusnik I received the same answer *nyet* with slight variations. They hinted that I might know some state secrets (!) because my husband had been a physicist. That was in spite of the fact that my husband died almost five years before I applied to OVIR. They also hinted they didn't like my skills in English. "Who knows what you are going to speak about there" said one of KGB men. There were also attempts to make me speak negatively of the Soviet power, a punishable crime at that time. They couldn't succeed in doing this. I had been a propagandist, as I mentioned above, for many years while working at the University. All the teachers were obliged to perform these unpleasant duties of calling black white! I know the *right* way to answer such kind of questions.

And so it went on for about seven years. The times were really hard. Especially difficult were the last two years before the departure. My wish to emigrate was no longer a secret from my neighbors. They didn't learn it from me, to be sure. They saw militiamen coming to me now and then to see what I was doing and it was easy for my neighbors to guess where the shoe pinched.

Before they found out I was going to leave the country, they were very kind to me. They appreciated my help to their children and grandchildren in their school studies and my quiet way of life. Now the situation changed dramatically. I began to find anonymous letters in my mailbox with threats and curses. On my door facing the landing I often found some anti-Semitic inscriptions and swastikas chalked. More than once I was afraid to come out of my apartment. It was useless to complain to militia. I was really at a loss what to do under such circumstances.

In the seventh year of my being a refusnik I began to think about changing the place of residence inside the U.S.S. R. I had some friends in Latvia, one of the Baltic republics

annexed by Stalin in 1940. They wrote to me that the situation there was much better than in the Ukraine. Anti-Semitism was not felt so strongly. Many Latvians have friends and relatives abroad so they sympathize with Jews to some degree. They don't envy them their alleged good luck — a very vague possibility to emigrate. The standard of life in Baltic republics was better than in other Soviet republics.

However, to make such a decision come true, to realize it, was a very difficult venture indeed. Even changing the place of residence within the city is not easy. It is much more difficult in case of different cities, to say nothing of the cities belonging to different republics. Usually such exchanges take years and years. Still such exchanges do take place, and I decided to try.

In the U.S.S.R. there are special offices called exchange bureaus which deal with such cases. The person who wants to exchange his room, or rooms, or an apartment must hand in an application with the description of his residence and state what he wishes in exchange and where. The data are classified and entered into books of internal (in the same city) and external exchanges. The payment for such services is not high. You may come to the office and look through the offers of other people. It takes months and sometimes years to find something proper, meeting to some degree your requirements. On the other hand, the family with which you want to exchange places of residence must also approve what you offer. Only then the bureaucratic machine begins to work in a very slow and agonizing way. The officials come to you to check up what you have, and they see to it that there is no great difference in the floor space in the apartment exchanged, even a small difference put them on their guard. Since apartments belong to the state in the Soviet Union, the officials are very suspicious (unless bribed liberally) and always ready to discover some speculative motives in exchanges.

For a year and a half I endeavored to exchange my apartment for one in Riga (Latvia). But my efforts were fruitless.

I RECEIVE THE LONG AWAITED PERMISSION

At last came 1987. For two years we had had a new leader Mikhail Gorbachev. We, refusniks, began to hope for some changes. One could feel fresh winds blowing.Even KGB men became more polite and hinted at some essential changes. The same referred to officials in OVIR.

My hopes and presentiments turned out to be true. The officials in OVIR were so

kind, they didn't even demand a new invitation from the relatives. Many of my fellow-sufferers and myself received the long-awaited permissions to emigrate. I couldn't believe my eyes and ears. Immediately I gave a long distance call to Bernice, my American cousin, and told her the good news. Her answer was emotional: "I can't believe it"!

I came to the final stage at last — getting a visa. The procedure which comes before getting a visa for emigration is not easy either. It is a very time and nerve consuming business. At OVIR they give you a long list of documents and certificates you have to submit, forms you have to fill up before you receive an exit visa. Those papers must affirm that

1. you have returned to the college you graduated from all diplomas about your education and degrees;
2. you have permission from your parents and nearest relatives to leave the country and they have no claims on you. If parents are dead, the certificates of their death must be produced;
3. you have returned all rewards given to you by authorities. In my case it was a medal for honest labor during many years and the medals my late husband received for fighting in the so-called Great Patriotic War (WWII);
4. you have turned off your telephone from the net and also handed over your electric meter;
5. you have had your apartment examined and pay for redecoration in accordance with the calculation made by the house management.

In spite of quite recent redecoration and repairs (it is always done at the expense of tenants), I had to pay 300 rubles. Many more *spravkas* (certificates) of lesser importance are demanded, and all this takes a lot of time and nerves. One instance may be given. At the electric office they demanded a certificate that I had returned the electric meter. I suggested that I'd pay for it and leave it in my apartment. The answer was adamant *nyet!* My argument that in such case I'd be without electric light for some days before my departure didn't impress them. I could just hear an angry answer: "Such people as you are may be without electricity and it serves you right!"

Through all such obstacles and humiliation one has to go if he wishers to leave the country. The Helsinki agreements do not help much.

In such an atmosphere of hatred on the part of the neighbors, with all the officials trying to make things more difficult than they should be, I don't think I'd be able to go

through all this nightmare if it were not for my late husband's cousin Tanya, who came from Baku to help me and who saw me off to the very Soviet border. I'll never forget her kind help and solicitude. The departure from my native country was not easy either. Though officials in OVIR promised to give me permission to leave via Moscow by air, they were not good as their word. I had to go via Chop by railway. Chop is a small town in the Western Ukraine on the very border with Czechoslovakia and Hungary. I went to Moscow trying to buy a through railway ticket to Vienna for myself and a ticket to Chop for Tanya. I did manage to buy such tickets. But the officials of the Soviet power are not easily outwitted. At Chop I had to change trains all the same. This change turned out to be very unpleasant, to put it mildly, and took a long time. As soon as we arrived at Chop, Tanya was immediately arrested and kept at the militia station for three or four hours. Meanwhile I was very nervous and didn't know what to do. When Tanya returned at last after being fined, she was told she must leave Chop at once. It was a border town and no one but transit passengers and people with special permits could stay there. Tanya's objection to the effect that there were no trains for Moscow till 5 a.m. didn't produce any impression on the militiamen. They said she might go on foot.

We ran to the ticket office and bought a ticket for 5 a.m. Moscow train for Tanya. Till that time she would have to hide herself from those ubiquitous militiamen. As for me, though there was a train almost empty for Vienna, they made me stay for one day more at Chop. They said the custom officials would not be able to check up the baggage in such a short time. In fact, they had two hours at their disposal and there were only seven people to go through the customs. They just wanted to make us feel we were second rate people deprived of any rights. I was given a cot in a room where there were already three women sleeping.

On the following day it was only in the evening that I left Chop. The custom officials began to work only one hour before the train's departure. It showed quite clearly they could have done it on the previous day. The checking up was done in a very rude way: all the things were thrown out of the suitcases and after checking pushed back in disorder, so that it was difficult to shut the suitcase.

At last we left the ill-fated Chop and the train was bound for Vienna. While in the train leaving my native country behind me, I couldn't get rid of the thought: why should it be Chop, not Brest? The latter wasn't a border town. It would spare the emigre's many troubles. Soviet authorities probable knew better, they wanted people to suffer. It was not until we crossed the Austrian border that we could breathe freely. All

the way to it there were numerous checks up by Czech and Hungarian officers and men. We were, so to speak, under the *care* of younger brothers from the socialist block countries.

I AM ABROAD ON THE WAY TO AMERICA

Hurray! We are in Vienna. It was for the first time in my life that I was abroad. In the Soviet Union we were a closed society and only official representatives and some chosen people could go abroad.

We were nine refugees: at that time, in 1987, the emigration suspended after 1979 *exodus* just began. Nobody was on the platform when we went out of the train. We all felt not a little embarrassed and confused. In some minutes, however, some representatives of HIAS came. Since that time on we were taken care of by Jewish organizations.

Vienna is a very beautiful city. It was the first Western city I saw and I was greatly impressed by its streets, nice buildings, magnificent stores with shining shop windows with such abundance of goods I had never seen before. The quantity of cars moving and parked was simply unbelievable.

I lived in Vienna for a week only and tried to see what I could in this wonderful city. Since my resources were limited, I was just able to walk along the streets admiring very nice buildings, churches, cathedrals, monuments. Once with other refugees I was in the Arts and History Museum and was greatly impressed by its rich collections. Our principal task in Vienna, though, was to fill in blanks of numerous forms, to go to HIAS and JOINT, to listen to different lectures and instructions at which many valuable pieces of advice were given. In a week we left for Italy. After being in Rome for a week, we were transferred to Ladispoli to stay there till all the documents were ready for our entering the U.S.A.

To be sure I let my relatives in Milwaukee know about my whereabouts and where the matters stood. I talked with my cousin Bernice several times over the telephone. We were both greatly excited.

I stayed in Rome for a week. All the week minus the time necessary to go to different offices dealing with refugees I was walking and sightseeing in this Eternal City. It is not for me to describe its wonders. I tried to see and to absorb as much as possible.

In a week we went to Ladispoli. It is a resort town situated not far from Rome on the shore of the Mediterranean. It takes about a half hour by train to get there from Rome. There we had to rent apartments and wait for the permission to enter the U.S.A.

The time I spent in Ladispoli, though full of worries and expectations, of longings to come to the far-away America, to have dreams come true, was not bad at all. I stayed there for a month and a half with some other refugees. It was spring. The warm Italian sun and the blue sea seemed to caress and soothe us after all the troubles we went through.

I already had some friends among the refugees. Especially friendly I became with a young lady from Leningrad, Elen by name. Her husband left for the U.S.A. ten years before, expecting her to follow in a short time. However, she could not receive the permission from OVIR and for ten years had been a *refusnik*. She and her son Zhenya helped me a lot. We rented an apartment together with one more family, an elderly couple from Moscow. It was a kind of communal apartment reminding us of our native country. We became very close friends. Since I was traveling alone, they tried to help me in every possible way. Now that I am already a permanent resident of the U.S.A. with a green card in my possession, I don't forget my friends and with Elen we frequently exchange letters and cards. She lives with her family in Boston.

During my stay in Ladispoli, I tried not to waste time. I bathed in the Mediterranean Sea (we lived quite near it), read many interesting books which were not available in the Soviet Union, went to the local synagogue and studied Hebrew there. Besides I taught a group of Soviet refugees to speak English.

While we were in Ladispoli, we were often summoned by HIAS to Rome to fill in different forms, to be interviewed. The most important interview was at the American Consul's. For some reason our fingerprints were taken. We used those occasions to see Rome once more, to admire its streets, squares, buildings and famous ruins.

Though my means were limited, I tried hard to save a little money to be able to travel to some places in Italy. I managed to go on an excursion to the North of Italy. I lack words to describe all the wonderful places I saw in the North of Italy: Siena, Pisa with its graceful Leaning Tower, Florence, the cradle of Italian Renaissance with its beautiful Uffizi Palace, and Venice with its intricate network of canals and numerous bridges. Everything seemed miraculous. I am happy I saw those wonderful places. God knows

if I'll be able to see them again. But as a poet said: *their wonders may still be in fancy possessed.*

Everything comes to an end. On the 17th of June 1987 we left the sunny Italy and on the 18th after a short stay at the Kennedy airport in New York, I arrived in Milwaukee. Though from my childhood on I have been accustomed to think of Milwaukee as a city situated far away behind the ocean but very near and dear, I never ever believed I'd find myself in this city. I did come to Milwaukee and at the Mitchell International Airport was very warmly welcomed by my dear cousin Bernice, her son Mordecai Lee and Mordecai's wife Storm. I was very deeply touched and couldn't trust my senses that I was in America. It was like a wonderful dream.

Even now that I have been here in Milwaukee for about three years and am a permanent resident of this great country, have a green card and many benefits of which my compatriots in the Soviet Union can only dream, I sometimes begin to doubt that it was me, an elderly woman, who under very hard circumstances, pressure and hate, managed to fight for her right to leave the country of her birth and come here.

America is really a wonderful country. Though, as every country, it has its problems, there is immeasurable distance between democracy and totalitarism, under which I lived for more than sixty years.

Great changes are going on in the country of my birth. From the bottom of my heart I wish they would bring peace and prosperity to all long suffering peoples of the Soviet Union.

Together, with my relatives and my new American friends, I repeat: *God bless America.*

S. Komissarchik
Milwaukee, 1990